

Blessed Composition

by My Wunderwaffle iz missin

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Summary: When UNSC forces intercept Storm Covenant chatter about a superweapon, they hire a private mercenary contractor to stop them. The mercenaries find a weapon of horrifying power and the leaders of the Storm, who will stop at nothing to get it. Success means an unimaginable amount of credits. Failure means destruction of humanity's space faring fleet. Starting with the UNSC Infinity.

1. Assassination I

****Welcome to Blessed Composition! This has been a story that I have been thinking about and went through several drafts. This was inspired by Clive Cussler's Oregon Files series, which I definitely recommend to anyone!****

****I do not own Halo.****

* * *

><p>Grunts were twitchy.<p>

Being the cannon fodder and most common soldier encountered within the Covenant, the grunts had their strength in numbers, being deployed to overwhelm. Usually they were little threat alone, able to be put down with a single well placed magnum shot to the head. Even a few shots of their own weapons, the Plasma Pistol or Needler were sufficient. It was even more amusing that they began running frantically around when the leader, usually an elite had been killed. This made them less of a threat and much easier to kill.

One particular grunt had likely been assigned to be sentry duty and lookout for a ledge overlooking an enormous Covenant camp. Shuffling from side to side and fiddling with his pink needler, it didn't take a second glance to conclude that it was bored. Had he known that humans were watching him, he would have instantly left his post and ran in a usual grunt manner to an elite that was likely to be less

than pleased.

The shadowy figure had slowly been creeping up behind the sentry. Every now and then, the grunt would look around and then resume toying with his gun. He was definitely grateful that it wasn't a jackal. He would have had to already kill the birdlike creature due to its increased senses. The armor on the Spartan was sleek, being dark green in color. The helmet that encased his head had a skull imprint into the visor, indicating that it was a War Master variant. Operator armor covered his shoulderpads and an Enforcer chest plate covered his ventral side. The Spartan stepped forward and seized the grunt's neck. Since it was unaware, it only had time to raise its arms in panic before the Spartan jerked its side sideways in an unnatural angle. A muffled pop gave away that the neck had been snapped.

"Crimson Leader here," he spoke in a hushed tone, despite being inaudible outside his MJOLNIR GEN2 armor. "sentry neutralized." Like a group of spectres, three other figures faded into light. They were hidden so well, it would have fooled an attentive elite. Each Spartan wore a different headgear and carried different weapons. One Spartan wore a Oceanic helmet and carried the standard MA5D Assault Rifle, another wore the Engineer variant and held an M395 DMR and the last one had donned a Soldier helmet and was carrying a SRS99-S5 AM Sniper System.

"You know," The Spartan with the Engineer helmet spoke up, "if we have to go loud, we'll have to take out the Covenant that we snuck around."

"Well chances are, that's gonna happen." Crimson leader replied, "So I suggest you save your ammo."

He waved up the Spartan wielding the Sniper Rifle and as he approached, he looked at his other comrades and parted his arms in a wave motion. Both Spartans nodded and they took defensive positions close to nearby trees. The leader of the Spartan fireteam Crimson took his position next to the sniper and laid prone, crawling up to the ridge.

The view was vast, with a large jungle spanning out before them and a large clearing with a metal floor, indicating a Forerunner building. On the floor were groups of tall poles with glowing covenant spikes protruding from the center. There was a flurry of motion on the ground as Crimson leader reached into his hip pouch and removed a set of optics. A sealing sound on his helmet's front told him that his spotting gear was secure.

Twisting the dials on both lenses, the spotting gear zoomed in on the Covenant troops on the ground. Jackals walked casually with their bright blue and yellow shields on their arms. Grunts milled together in packs and there seemed to be only a few elites overlooking the entire pack, occasionally growling orders in their native tongue at the lesser species.

"Target arriving in two minutes." Crimson handler Jared Miller reported to the team. It was high stakes, now or never. All of the members, not just the four Spartans of fireteam Crimson were aware of the risks, but Commander Sarah Palmer, Miller, Dalton and all personnel onboard the advanced UNSC ship in charge of planning this

highly secret operation's ways of going wrong in every direction. The operation was so secret, that when Captain Thomas Lasky of the UNSC _Infinity_ had passed the intelligence to Palmer who in turn, passed it to Crimson, the fireteam was unaware of their target until they were en route on a Pelican. Accompanied by Palmer herself.

The ground shuddered as Crimson leader and his sniper only shifted their eyes to the disturbance above. A trio of bulbous purple skinned aircraft passed over the treetops above, swooping over the long strip of Covenant activity. The banshees were clear and peeled off, likely flying back to their home ship somewhere above.

The Spartan toggled his proximity camera, a small optic device that held a clear view of the corridor the target's aircraft would approach from. Sure enough, the outline of a Phantom shuttle was approaching between the mountain range. The heart shaped craft slid effortlessly through the air and the ominous droning sound it was famous for began to slowly resonate through the valley. It descended slightly above the ground before dropping its gravity lift. Now out of sight of the camera, Crimson leader toggled back to his optics on his helmet, now focusing on the purple craft that hovered at the end of the Forerunner strip. Two elites clad in maroon armor with four blue lights on their helmets stepped forward. Elites with such armor were known as Zealots, the generals and admirals in the Covenant military. Zealots were also known to be in special operations team and it was rumored that the high leaders of the Storm were protected by a secret group of the very best members of the Zealot rank.

Crimson was there to show them that the Zealot's security failed. Their sniping point was nearly a hundred feet above the ground where the Covenant camp was and far away as well. The sniper rifle that the Crimson marksman carried would be put to the test in attempting the shot at such a range.

Crimson leader zoomed further as a figure dropped from the Phantom's gravity bay. Bearing the markings of another Zealot, it glanced at its brethren giving them a slight nod. The second figure began to descend and the elite's metal feet touched the ground. In the optics, Crimson leader saw the two Zealots stiffen and stand slightly taller.

Focusing the optics on the newer elite, his HUD began lighting up with target confirmation. The elite had armor that was similar to Zealot armor, but instead of four blue lights on the helmet, it was a larger symbol. All of the confirmation instruments shortly after completing the scan pulsed green.

"We have confirmation of Jul 'Mdama at the Forerunner structure." Miller reported from the operations center. "Crimson, you are clear to take the shot."

"Roger Miller." Crimson leader replied, turning to his sniper. "You ready?"

"Affirmative." He replied, taking out a magazine. Opening the chamber, the sniper slid the rounds inside and pulled the charging handle. Setting up the bipod on a steady surface the sniper gave a nod to Crimson leader to show that he was ready.

"Target confirmed, marking now." Crimson leader had set a red diamond on 'Mdama, who was deep in conversation with his Zealot accomplice. Both were slowly walking, but stopped frequently to exchange more words.

Crimson's sniper began to focus, putting the reticule slightly ahead of the elite. 'Mdama was about halfway across the complex that was viewable. The two Zealots that stood guard now trailed behind, completely unaware of what was about to happen.

Crimson's sniper held his breath and adjusted his aim one final time, putting Jul 'Mdama's head in the center of his crosshairs.

His finger tightened on the trigger and fired the shot.

The rifle cracked and with its recoil, lurched backwards slightly from the sniper bracing for the recoil. The bullet trail appeared instantly as the 14.5x114 millimeter bullet exited the barrel and split in flight on the way to its target. A split second later, Crimson leader saw Jul 'Mdama's shields disappear as the round effortlessly passed through the energy barrier and shredded armor. The bullet impacted just behind the eye, spraying out purple blood. The lifeless body collapsed to the floor and it had taken a second for the accompanying Covenant to realize what had happened to their leader.

"Target is confirmed killed!" Miller shouted enthusiastically. "Excellent work Crimson!" There were cheers in the operations center that could be heard in the background.

Fireteam Crimson was already packing up; Crimson leader removed his optics as he signaled the other members of his team to begin moving out. He took one last look at the Covenant gathered around 'Mdama's body. One of the Zealots ignited an Energy Sword and roared in anger.

"Job's done Crimson, but you're not out of the woods yet." Palmer reminded the team as they began heading toward the LZ. "Covenant are going to be combing this jungle for anybody and you best be out of there." True to her words, the Banshees that had swooped over earlier were now heard moving in their direction. The Spartan with the DMR was on point and raised his head to look around. The aircraft were not visible due to the thick density of the forest's trees that stretched overhead.

The team kept a steady pace, constantly watching their motion trackers for movement. Oddly, there were only a couple Covenant search parties and the only patrol encountered so far were a small group of jackals and an elite. Crimson had taken cover behind a few large rocks adjacent to the patrol. A jackal had glanced in their direction as they passed, but apparently did not see them as the group moved deeper into the forest.

"Crimson, you've got hostiles closing on your position!" Miller informed, "Get to the LZ now!"

"Let's move." Crimson leader ordered his partners, they all nodded and began jogging away.

It had taken a few minutes, but Crimson reached the clearing where a

large rock towered over them in front. Crimson leader took a beacon and activated it, tossing the small device nearby.

"Miller, the beacon's set." Crimson leader informed his handler, "Awaiting Pelican."

"Dalton's got your ride en route." Jared sounded a little worried, "But since the beacon was the only way to signal your arrival, it's likely the Covenant are after you too."

Crimson leader gestured for his Spartans to take defensive positions. He breathed a sigh of relief as the familiar Pelican dropship began to grow in size. Nearly the entire team was relieved; Crimson hadn't seen a Pelican for nearly four days, being deep in Covenant controlled territory.

"This is Pelican Hotel Mike Seven Nine Two." The pilot's voice cracked through the radio. "We have a visual on Crimson and moving to extract."

Crimson leader saw a flash out of the corner of his eye and was in the midst of turning when the Fuel Rod bomb exploded nearby, showering them with dirt and rocks.

"Shit!" Seven Nine Two cursed loudly as he brought the bird up. "Enemy aircraft inbound!"

"Crimson!" Jared Miller yelled out, "You've got heavy Covenant forces moving in!"

"Dalton!" Commander Palmer's firm voice cut through, "Get Crimson some air support and some guns!"

"Not able to do that Commander. Too much air activity." Dalton calmly responded. It puzzled Crimson many times on how Dalton was unfazed by the Commander's harshness. They've seen her in a very angry state and it wasn't pretty.

"Seven Nine Two, break off! Lead the enemy air away until we can secure the LZ!"

"Got it." The pilot responded, "I don't know how long I will be able to dodge them for."

The leader of fireteam Crimson turned to his teammate. "Do you still have the trip wires?"

"I still do." She responded, producing a coil of wire after setting her Assault rifle down. He turned back to his team, "Get out all of your grenades and start setting traps about ten meters in the forest." By then, they could faintly hear the ravenous chatter of grunts, which meant the first wave, was going to hit them soon.

* * *

><p>So, Crimson's pulled off quite the audacious mission, taking out the notorious Jul 'Mdama. You all are probably asking "Why are you killing Jul 'Mdama this early?"

**Relax, it's part of the story. This is merely a prelude which will

set off a chain of events. Perhaps more attention should have been paid to the lack of security. Jackals should have been covering the vantage points right?**

Anyway, I hope you've enjoyed the start of my latest project after a lengthy hiatus. Chapter 2&3 are written and will be released shortly. Thanks!

2. Assassination II

I'm back! Did you miss me?

I am going to clarify one thing before beginning. I wanted Crimson to remain as anonymous as possible to make sure you knew that they are not the main characters of the story. Although I think the summary explains that.

* * *

><p>Crimson leader looked upwards just as the Pelican fired its laser cannon. The beam cut through an approaching Banshee, sending large pieces everywhere.<p>

The grenade traps had gone off, taking out nearly a dozen grunts and more were already within sight, firing at the four Spartans taking cover behind some rocks in front of the clearing. Crimson leader spotted an elite leading the grunt packs and began putting down rounds from his two M6J pistols. The elite weaved away, trying to throw off his aim. The bullets still found their mark on a few unlucky grunts and jackals.

The crack of the sniper rifle came from his left as Crimson's sniper put down a pair of elites in rapid succession. Without wasting time, he shifted his aim and pulled the trigger again, sending a grunt's methane tank off. The explosive gas ignited and wiped out four more advancing next to him as well as downing an elite's shields which allowed Crimson leader to kill it with a pair of pistol shots.

The Pelican hovered backwards, spinning up its autocannon. Crimson stepped back to let the lethal rounds rip the advancing Covenant to pieces.

"Commander," Miller came back on after a brief absence. "I'm detecting Prometheans headed in Crimson's direction!"

"Dalton!" Palmer shouted, "Is the Pelican on the ground?!"

"She is at the LZ retrieving Crimson at the moment." Dalton replied, smoothly.

As if on cue, nearly a dozen Promethean Crawlers burst out of the trees. The metallic constructs were quick and laid down a deadly field of fire with either Boltshots or Suppressors. Occasionally UNSC forces would find the lethal sniper version that fired the dangerous Binary Rifle. Quadruped in appearance, they acted like wolves, surrounding their target and maintained strength in numbers.

Crimson was beginning to board the Pelican when the Prometheans appeared and sprinted forward, opening fire with their hardlight

weapons. Immediately, the Spartans returned fire, destroying a few. The marines inside the Pelican also began holding them back to keep them distracted enough for the Spartans to try to get onboard.

Soon after the crawlers were mostly eliminated, the larger more imposing constructs known as the Knights began to appear. Unlike the Crawlers, who often displayed animalistic behavior when fought, the Promethean Knights were much more dangerous, often displaying tactics normally carried out by an elite. They were carrying a much wider variety of weapons, from the close range Scattershot to the notorious Incineration Cannon. In addition to dangerous weapons, they were also equipped with a hardlight shield that recharged at a rapid rate as well as a sword on their arm to execute close range attacks. In conclusion, knights were problematic, even for Spartan fireteams.

As the first knights began to emerge, firing Light Rifle shots, Crimson's sniper pumped one round into four different knights. Having to do so, took down their shields and made their disposal much easier. The closest one fell to Crimson leader's twin pistols, twitching and falling slowly, the light began to cover the robot as it dissolved into nothing. Crimson's other two Spartans blasted another pair of knights to the same fate as the first.

Upon seeing its teammates being killed, the fourth jumped back into the jungle. A screeching sound was heard as a Promethean with two circular pods to keep it airborne was released. It flew over to the still dissolving knight and cast a blue beam over it. However the revival was in vain, as when the knight had retreated, Crimson had boarded the Pelican. The Promethean forces had finally reached the clearing without resistance. All they saw was a retreating Pelican flying safely out of reach.

Palmer breathed a sigh of relief in the ops center as the Spartan handlers began chatting excitedly about Crimson's success. Miller was the center of attention, being Crimson's handler. The others began slapping his back, congratulating him. Miller could only grin sheepishly as the praise went on. Palmer, smiling raised a hand to quell the talk.

"Crimson did a damn fine job back there. With the death of Jul 'Mdama, we are a big step closer to ending our conflict here. Our war with the Covenant is far from over, but today is a day that we will celebrate! Miller, excellent job on directing the op. Both you and Crimson should expect a healthy bonus in your next paycheck! Tonight, we host a party dedicated to Crimson!"

* * *

><p>UNSC _**Infinity**_

Later that day

Immediately following the Pelican's arrival back on _Infinity_, Crimson stepped out and was greeted with cheers from everyone. Marines, deckhands, other Spartans, even Palmer herself stood in front of everyone with a broad smile on her face.

Crimson's members shared a confused glance and removed their helmets. Crimson leader walked up to Palmer, snapping a crisp salute. His eyes were dark blue and had a thin layer of blond hair atop his head. He

looked at Palmer in surprise when she saluted back, the grin never leaving her face. "What did you do with Commander Palmer?" He asked her, causing nearly the entire bay to erupt with laughter.

"C'mon Crimson!" Spartan Paul Demarco shouted from the crowd, "Show some love!"

Palmer however, ignored his statement and shook the hand of all of Crimson's members, informing them that many UNSC media correspondents were on their way to interview the fireteam about the mission that was rumored to have been impossible and suicidal. While the members of Majestic would have eagerly jumped at the chance to be featured on UNSC media's top networks, Crimson was much more reserved. They'd take the interview, but would probably stop when the reporters tried to probe into more of what they were authorized to access.

That night, in the entire deck that belonged to the Spartans was not being used for war purposes by its residents. Instead of housing machines specially designed for fitting of the MJOLNIR armor, much of the giant room was converted into a social gathering area. Many tables were set around the command area where platters of mouthwatering food for the cracker barrel lay. The tables held everything, from cured meats, cheeses, crackers to several glasses of wine. Spartans mingled everywhere, all out of their iconic armor. Palmer couldn't help but smile as she saw Crimson leader whisper something to Demarco and both laughed loudly, clanking wine glasses. Jared Miller was surrounded by other Spartan handlers and it wasn't hard to tell that he was enjoying himself.

"Commander Palmer." She heard her name called from the entrance to the barracks. Turning to face Captain Thomas Lasky she walked over towards him. He smiled back, but she knew him for too long to know that something bad was on his mind.

"Captain Lasky." Palmer stood opposite from him, with her hands on her hips, "You look like you could use some refreshments."

"Not now Sarah." Lasky waved his hand, "There's something else I needed to discuss with you."

It must have been serious, as Lasky rarely addressed anyone by their first name.

Palmer turned to Crimson leader, "Come with me." She regarded Demarco next, "You're in charge while I'm gone. Make sure nobody gets out of control."

"Won't happen on my watch Commander." Demarco snapped a salute. Satisfied, Palmer and Crimson leader followed Lasky to the Infinity's bridge. It was much more spacious than any UNSC vessel ever commissioned. When Lasky had been inside a Stalwart-class frigate, the bridge was cramped and made him cranky for some reason. The outside windows twinkled with thousands of faraway stars. To the right of the ship stood the enormous metal world of Requiem. The reason of Infinity's deployment, Requiem was a safe house for the forerunner commander Didact. Home to countless Prometheans, it was one of the most hostile environments the UNSC had ever encountered, rivaling that of Flood infested Installation 04 before its destruction. Having discovered the planet six months ago, the UNSC Infinity had been drawn inside for the first time. Reunited with the

long lost war hero, Master Chief, they managed to get out of the world and back to Earth. The Spartan II had stayed behind with his rampant AI companion Cortana to delay the Didact's departure. Palmer held a lot of respect for Spartan 117, risking the life of his own digital partner to postpone humanity's extinction. Upon seeing him again in the _Infinity_'s barracks, Palmer noticed that he had hung his head slightly lower and did not speak a word as he walked across the quarters. She knew something died inside of him when he walked past her while she was monitoring another Spartan on a treadmill. He only gave her a simple nod then turned away to a station to remove his armor.

"Sarah, while eavesdropping on the Covenant chatter, they reported trying to find a Forerunner superweapon." Lasky began, "Although the only known Forerunner superweapon was the Composer before the Master Chief destroyed it. The tone and urgency of the broadcaster sounds like they might harness this new weapon against the UNSC to avenge 'Mdama. Make him seem like a martyr." The main holotank displayed Requiem with red points indicating Covenant territory. Small triangles showed locations of known Covenant ships. They were spaced out enough for Infinity to take on all of them, however recent chatter had given the UNSC awareness of a few Covenant stealth frigates in the area. Displayed next to the ship were its name, first sighting, class, weapons and overall status. Seeing this much about the enemy fleet gave the UNSC battlegroup a big advantage.

"Roland managed to isolate the transmission from here." Lasky touched one part of the edge of the Covenant controlled area and parted his index fingers, allowing the terrain to be closer and more detailed.

"It's odd that the signal originated just a couple miles at a Covenant outpost just a few hours after Crimson eliminated 'Mdama." A holographic avatar added after appearing in gold light. He had the appearance of a World War II pilot with a coat and aviator goggles. He was Roland, the Infinity's AI, responsible for most of the operations beyond human control. Although he has an ongoing rivalry with Spartan Miller, Roland usually got along with most personnel.

"I don't like the Covenant looking for a doomsday device if we can do something about it." Palmer stated, beginning to turn to head back to the Spartan barracks. "I'll get some fireteams and start monitoring activity on the ground."

"Wait." Crimson leader placed a hand on her shoulder. He pointed to the holotank and its transmitting origin, where the triangles of two nearby cruisers were slowly moving towards the broadcasting signal. "If the Covenant is interested in getting this weapon, then why are the ships moving towards its original broadcasting source? Why aren't they spreading over their territory to find it?"

"Then the weapon must not be on Requiem." Lasky murmured, "I'll get a message to FLEETCOM and let them know that we may have a crisis on our hands. It's possible that there is more Storm Covenant than what is on Requiem currently and they might be searching for the weapon."

"ONI might have intel on the location, but I don't think a Spartan fireteam will be enough to stop them." Roland added, "We still have a

lot to do before Requiem becomes safe for the science teams to do whatever they please."

Lasky scratched his head, "I bet they'll find somebody."

* * *

><p>And you can guarantee that ONI will find the right person to do the job. Things are heating up. Looks like the major threats to humanity appear every day! Enjoying it so far? Be sure to review or favorite this because there is more to come!
**

3. Gathering Disaster I

Not a lot of action in this chapter. More of a teaser of what's going to happen.

* * *

><p>Dusk fell upon the city of Berlin. Nestled in the center of the Unified German Republic, the historic place still showed its relics that told countless stories all the way back to the twentieth century. On the outskirts lay a jet black building that was thirty stories tall and quite wide. From a bird's eye view, it had three spokes, all forming lines to look like the compound had been split into thirds. A large pole stood in the center, connected by cables at the end of the spokes.<p>

The building was accessible to anybody, but only a few knew its true purpose.

It was the location of the Office of Naval Intelligence European Headquarters. Featuring a bunker to survive Covenant glassings and enough survival equipment for the facility's seven hundred and fifty personnel to survive for nine months, it was one of the five most important Office sites on Earth.

On the thirtieth floor, Brigadier General Emmett Michaelson had been placing papers in his briefcase to be ready to head home. Short in height, but intimidating and with an aura of authority, he was the director of the Office's European tasks.

Born on the tourist colony of Arcadia, Michaelson had enlisted in the UNSC Marine Corps the day after hearing the Harvest annihilation. After twenty years, two promotions and four battles with the Covenant, Michaelson was recommended for ONI by Rear Admiral Rich. Although initially reluctant to accept, due to his newly formed family at the time, Michaelson knew that he did not want to return to his two children and wife in a body bag. The recipient of the Bronze Star, Red Legion of Honor and two Purple Hearts, Michaelson was known through the Berlin office as a go-getter and someone who wasn't kept from a field task because of his desk job.

"Mr. Michaelson," His secretary, a pretty blonde haired woman stuck her head inside his office. "You may want to check your messages. I've already gotten several calls from FLEETCOM insisting that you read something they sent you."

He nodded, looking at the photograph of his wife and two kids. "Thank

you Mackenzie, I'll look into it."

She turned away, shutting the door. Michaelson sighed, eager to head home and pulled open his message box. Sure enough, there was a top priority message from FLEETCOM. He opened the file and read intently.

* * *

><p>To: Emmett P. Michaelson, ONI European Director

From: Duncan N. Wells, Admiral FLEETCOM EXECUTIVE

Date sent: May 20, 2558

It's been too long Emmett, perhaps more than six years since we've seen each other. I'd love to catch up on good old times whenever possible for you.

Pleasantries aside, I have received very disturbing news.

Yesterday at 1457 hours, deep within Covenant controlled territory on Requiem, Spartan IV fireteam Crimson neutralized high value target Jul 'Mdama. 'Mdama and his Storm army are responsible for nearly all casualties humanity has suffered on Requiem since its discovery. Shortly afterwards, Infinity eavesdroppers intercepted a broadcast from an outpost nearby. The transmission is about a new superweapon that was recently discovered while downloading data from their controlled archives.

Captain Thomas J. Lasky of the Infinity believes that the Covenant presence on Requiem is not the group assigned to look for this superweapon. While many at FLEETCOM believe it is a fake to get us on alert for nothing, I personally believe that with the death of their most important figure, they'll do anything to make 'Mdama's death a fuel source for vengeance. Due to Infinity being permanently stationed around Requiem until the expiration of her tour and all UNSC available fleets elsewhere, I am forced to come to you with other solutions to help investigate what the Storm Covenant has up their sleeves.

All the best,

Duncan N. Wells

Admiral FLEETCOM EXECUTIVE

UNSC 6**th**** Fleet Commander, ship UNSC **_**Khe Sanh**_

* * *

><p>Michaelson closed the file and sat back, closing his eyes and rubbing his palm against his face. The message might as well have told him that if he doesn't get a group together to stop Covenant rebels then everyone dies within the next twenty four hours.<p>

The first assets that had come to his mind were Office agents. Always ready and about as prepared as they come, they were known for their

lethality, persistence and hardness. It also drew criticism from several human rights activists about torture, which the Office was no stranger to using if the target refused to give up vital information. Plus, ONI agents weren't exactly ideal for dealing with mass groups of enemies, especially when they come in all shapes and sizes.

Michaelson reached into a classified file drawer and turned a switch at the end of his desk. Within seconds, the window providing a panorama of Berlin dimmed. While he was still allowed a magnificent view of the Brandenburg Gate, any possible prying eyes on the other side would be unable to see through his polarized window. Finding the proper papers, he told his secretary to activate security measures before beginning to read.

It was nearly midnight when he had finished reading the entire stack of papers. His secretary had already left, giving him the override key to arm the security in his office. Michaelson yawned before beginning his message. His day was over, but his agent's day was just beginning.

* * *

><p>Thanks to an extended time off, I had enough time to write even more! It's not easy being four chapters ahead of what I've published so far! Hope all of you are enjoying this!

**I may also be changing my username on here. Not sure just yet because my name is so long to type. (For the sake of other authors regarding me)
>

4. Gathering Disaster II

Northern Swarthmore University

Colony of Mortis, City of Swarthmore

May 23, 2558

Northern Swarthmore University was among the top three colleges on the colony of Mortis. Its location and namesake is in the northern and richer part of Swarthmore, Mortis' largest city. Established during the first decade of Mortis' early years of colonization, Northern Swarthmore was the leading college in the system in the fields of medical science, writing and humanities. The hall of fame was covered in plaques of previous alumni.

Such a hallway made Lauren Hessald feel underpowered. With countless awards and merits of overachieved students, the hall's purpose was to intimidate others. Those who did not falter were the ones who joined the records as the greatest students to ever walk into the campus. Lauren was always interested in medicine and took classes with enough work to make sleep impossible. Thankfully the school year was nearly over. She already wanted to go back to her friends back home.

She was very popular in her classes, among both men and women. With golden blonde hair, deep blue eyes and a perfect figure, there was little wonder to why she drew so much attention. It slightly amused

her when walking down the halls during passing period and would see groups of boys staring at her for a considerable period of time.

Upon reaching the Science Hall, she looked around. Oddly, there was nobody around. In her next class, which was a group of nearly two hundred students, there was some muffling in the auditorium. Lauren was about to investigate when she saw two figures round the corner at the far end. Fear began to immediately flood her veins as she saw the fully automatic rifles in their hands.

"Hey stop!" One of them yelled. She tried to run, but the two men were much faster and caught up in a matter of seconds. She felt herself being grabbed by the neck and pulled backwards.

"Well well well." A rather sinister voice came from behind her. "Looks like we've got a runaway."

"Runaway?" Lauren wondered aloud, before realizing what she just said.

"A fine one too." They turned her around to see two large men dressed in somewhat ragged fatigues. On the left shoulder pad was a red emblem of a pair of parallel fists inside a circle and a long streak partially across the top, ending in what seemed like a missile. It wasn't hard to tell that they were Insurrectionists. Even after the war with the Covenant, these pockets of rebels still continued to utilize terrorism and chaos for the UNSC.

"You know, as much as we want to kill you young lady, the boss says we need all students alive. So it's your lucky day." He said, pulling her on her feet. "Now walk in front. Try to run and we'll shoot you."

Forced to comply, Lauren was escorted directly to her classroom. Her eyes widened as she saw nearly two dozen more armed terrorists in the auditorium. Students and teachers were all huddled and sitting down. Occasionally a passing Insurrectionist would jam the barrel of his rifle in the back of a student that wasn't down to their liking. Upon the "urging" the student was not likely to get up again. The once clean and presentable auditorium was now a mess, as if a Mortis Storm had ripped through the center. It was obvious that the terrorists had purposely destroyed the science equipment to show their superiority and instill fear into the class.

"Just so you know." The larger man warned her, "We've cut off all communications from the university and still maintain a normal status. So nobody knows you're captured. Don't even try to call for help." He pointed towards an unconscious boy lying next to a COM. "That unfortunate kid already tried."

The lead Insurrectionist turned to the two men as they escorted Lauren. "Is she the last one?"

"Yes sir."

He studied her for a moment and gave a nod, "Alright. Bring her to Josi."

With a rough shove, Lauren found herself flung into the grasp of the

terrorist known as Josi. He reached into his pocket and removed one of the biggest knives she had ever seen. She found herself breathing heavily as the knife came closer until it made contact with her neck. The cold steel dug sharply into her sensitive skin as he tightened his grip.

"You are now live Josi." One of the Insurrectionists held a recording device, aiming it at both Lauren and Josi.

"It has been three weeks and you UNSC bastards still do not release our founder and change from your mistakes." The Insurrectionist leader began, walking onstage as if a professor. "We now go into Northern Swarthmore University to hold hundreds of innocents! I've decided what I'm going to do now. You had your chance to release him without conflict! What did you do? Nothing!"

Josi grinned as he adjusted his grip on the knife. Lauren tried to break free, but only slightly budged and accepted fate. Josi's grip was too strong.

"Now, maybe you assholes will do something! For every ten minutes that I do not see our leader inside this room, I will kill one person!" He gestured to Josi, "Starting with her! Josi?! DO IT!"

Lauren closed her eyes, hardly believing her life was over.

The door flung open. The knife never cut her throat.

As one, the terrorists and hostages looked to the open door at the back of the auditorium. There stood another figure, although much different than any other Insurrectionist anybody had ever seen.

The person in MJOLNIR armor calmly looked at the scene before him. The suit was steel and dark red colored with a HAZOP helmet with a silver visor, Recon chest plate and Mark IV shoulder pads. In his hands was a black bullpup rifle that had a top rail fitted with an ACOG scope. The students and staff gaped at the immense size of the man, nearly seven feet tall.

"You know, when I was in school, there was a very strict policy on no weapons. Looks like you've broken the rules."

"Freaks." The leader muttered in contempt. "I should have known."

The Spartan ignored his remark, "I have a paper with the access code to your cell's leader. I've been ordered by my superiors to hand it over. I will only do so once you and your gang buddies leave every hostage in here unharmed." He produced a small box and opened it to show a small strip of paper. "You have my word."

"No." The leader moved Josi off of Lauren and produced a pistol, putting the barrel to the back of her head. "Your reputation is bad once they find out that your mission caused a civilian casualty. Either way, you lose. All in the room die or my leader gets freed!"

"You're in no position to negotiate." The Spartan replied, slightly irritated.

"Yeah right. Even for a Spartan, you wouldn't get very far. There's still twenty of us and one of you."

"Who said I was by myself?"

"You have five seconds to give me that piece of paper or I extinguish her life!" The terrorist shouted, wanting to end things.

The Spartan picked up the box in his right hand. "Just don't damage the wrapping." In a split second, the Spartan had thrown the box right at the leader's face. The hard wood collided with his nose and it began to bleed. He dropped his pistol and began to put his hands on where the box had hit him.

Then hell broke loose.

A cry from the Insurrectionist known as Josi spurred the Spartan into motion. Instead, a shot came from the ceiling. Josi was unable to fire off any rounds before being cut down by a hail of bullets. All the terrorists screamed out loud, firing at the unknown enemy on the top. The Spartan aimed his rifle and fired three shots, dropping three targets. There was screaming from the hostages as the ten second fight raged on. The hidden warriors from the top expertly aimed and killed every single gunman. Now with only three terrorists remaining, the leader included. Spartan was about to finish them when, the three men grabbed Lauren and two other students and used them as shields.

"Bad move Spartan." The leader spat, jamming his pistol into Lauren's ear. The Spartan tensed slightly and raised his rifle when he heard her stifled cry. "Get your men to show themselves."

Because they had already made their presence known, the Spartan waved his free hand. In complete silence, another Spartan dropped down from the roof, freaking out a group of students as he descended. This Spartan was jet black colored with his armor being the CIO variant. He was carrying a BR85HB SR rifle. Alongside his arms were a pair of vicious looking knives.

After the Spartan, an ODSST descended using a rope. His suit was painted mostly black with green markings. An MA5D assault rifle was in his hands, smoking from recently firing.

Beside the Hazop Spartan, a massive figure faded from its invisibility. This operative towered over the Spartans with a much different armor and his face was obscured by a bluish dome visor. The weapon he carried was much different than the others, it was purple and green, with a thin barrel and circular stock. Once fearfully regarded, the operative was a sangheili, one of the Covenant species that presumably allied itself with humanity.

The terrorists must have known that their loss was inevitable. However, even in the face of defeat, they like to make things as antagonizing to the enemy as possible. The leader grinned as his finger tightened on the trigger. The CIO Spartan's hand rested on a knife on his hip. The unsheathing metal sounded as he gripped it, but did not let any Innies know that.

"You lose." The terrorist leader spat. He was about to pull the

trigger when the Hazop Spartan aimed over a hostage and fired. The sangheili fired one shot from his carbine into the head of the second terrorist.

In one motion, the Spartan whipped the knife in a throwing motion and flung it at the leader. Instantly, he let go of Lauren and stared at the blade in his chest before toppling to the ground.

It was silent as the hostages regarded the rather odd group of armed rescuers. Although there was still much to be done, the group still remained. The Hazop Spartan turned to his soldiers. The obvious posture and obedience of the others as they carried out his orders of leaving easily indicated that he was the leader of the rescue team. The others lowered ropes and ascended on them towards the ceiling. The sangheili nodded after being addressed by the Spartan and activated his camo, fading from sight.

He turned to the crowd and gave a subtle nod. "Class dismissed."

Instantly, the room erupted into applause as the Spartan nodded again. The sound of other police and medical personnel were heard as they began to examine the students and staff for injuries.

Lauren lost sight of the Spartan as people rushed everywhere, frantic to put the ordeal behind them as soon as possible. She finally saw him deep in conversation with several police agents. He must have seen her as he had terminated his conversation with the enforcement and made his way towards her.

"It's not easy to endure a hostage crisis." He began, "I'm sorry you had to go through that. What's your name?"

"Lauren."

"What a pretty name." The Spartan replied, relaxing slightly.

"May I ask who you are?"

"I can't say," He stiffened again, "but yo can call me Aegis."

Their conversation was interrupted when the CIO Spartan from earlier appeared by Aegis.

"We're ready to leave."

"Alright. Let the authorities know we are off and expect a transfer within the next three hours." Aegis turned to Lauren. "You take care of yourself kid."

With that, Aegis and the other Spartan opened the door and left the building.

* * *

><p>When Lauren later searched on several search engines about Aegis, there were no results pertaining to an individual. An entry with Spartan Aegis proved no fruitful. Even with advanced browsing and unclassified ONI material the results were irrelevant to her interest. It was as if the group that came to her rescue as well as

over two hundred other students and teachers never really existed.<p>

****Simple rescue the hostage mission. Not a problem for Aegis and his band of mercenaries! Wait until you see their ship.****

****Next chapter will be out shortly.**
>

5. Gathering Disaster III

****City of Swarthmore, UNSC Colony of Mortis****

****May 24, 2558****

The city of Swarthmore was the largest city on the colony of Mortis. Established during the 2490s, the colony had been one of the fastest growing, despite being near the corner of UNSC controlled space. The city was located all along the coast of the Western Ocean and held a major maritime and spaceport. Much of the resources the colony produced were produce, fish, clothing and minerals. Much of the planet's crust was encased with popular elements in food as well.

During the Human-Covenant war, the colony was attacked by a large Covenant fleet. After they had smashed through the UNSC's unprepared blockade, they proceeded to insert search teams for a beacon. Their target was actually located in the tallest skyscraper in Swarthmore. When the New Year arrived, it would line up in an exact point with an identical tower on Commerce, Mortis' sister world. It was a symbol of mutual agreement and partnership between the two colonies. Thanks to the brave men and women of the UNSC, they managed to pinpoint the beacon towards the star of the Mortis system. The Covenant had believed that the gods wanted them to follow it and before they fully realized what the beacon actually was, the slipspace point was locked and the entire fleet jumped into the star. They were instantly vaporized. Any stragglers that were not on the ship were quickly routed by combined UNSC forces, led by a team of Spartans. The Covenant hasn't been to Mortis since that battle.

The spaceport was performing its normal duties, with a trio of UNSC frigates in low orbit at the docks. It was visible to anyone on the ground, although from the view down there was not much activity that anyone could see. Up in high altitude, there was a flurry of activity as tug ships and other supply vessels tended to the larger armored ships.

If one were to look to the spaceport, they would have seen a fourth ship. Barely even perceived by anyone who happened to look up, she was much sleeker than the frigates. Although a frigate herself, she looked more like an ONI prowler than anything. Then again, only a few have seen the rare _Guardian_ class stealth frigates. Constructed from modified UNSC ships, the _Guardian_ class ships acted like the submarines of the 26th century. Slightly longer than the Paris heavies, the _Guardian_ classes were short lived. The idea behind the ships was to act as a carrier for a small but swift and powerful invasion force with enlarged hangars for aircraft storage. The ship would then provide overwatch for the ground forces as well as the target. Extremely hard to detect due to their engines emitting a

quieter and lower signature than the standard ship, they would be able to easily evade Covenant scanners. When discovered, the ship's advanced weaponry, such as her special MAC gun, were enough to eliminate Covenant frigates, destroyers and maybe cruisers as well.

The first ship of the line, the UNSC Guardian, was launched in the 2500s. It first saw action in the Eridanus rebellion, where it deployed an ODS force to an Insurrectionist controlled moon to cut off their supply centers. As ambitious and effective as they sounded, the Office of Naval Intelligence canceled their order of one hundred and thirty two to twenty one vessels. During the outbreak of the Covenant war, the Guardian class ships were put to the test against the alien weaponry and advanced detection systems. In the entire war, only one ship, the UNSC Ader FFG-332 was lost during the battle of Jericho VII. A Covenant carrier targeted it with pulse lasers, causing it to crash land. Thankfully, nothing was discovered once they glassed the colony.

For unknown reasons, the Guardian class ships were retired in 2547. The Office of Naval Intelligence escorted them to the far edges of deep space and they are stored at the UNSC boneyard Zero Five Nine Nine, a secret giant vault carved into an unknown moon that stores ONI equipment that is deemed decommissioned.

However, one such Guardian vessel, the UNSC Ballista did not share the fate her sister ships did. Although the Naval Intelligence shows that FFG-388, her HCS showed that she was retired, the presence immediately dismissed such speculation. Purchased by a retired Naval Intelligence agent, the Ballista vanished off all scopes for months before reemerging.

A D79H-TC Pelican approached the ship from the stern. Inside the cockpit, Aegis thumbed the controls once the Ballista's status flashed green, clearing him to land aboard. He removed his Hazop style helmet to reveal a face of masculinity. With auburn hair and radiant black eyes, he was often an attention drawer, attraction from women and jealousy to most other men. Born Trip Aegis on the moon of Europa orbiting Jupiter on November 9, 2522, he had joined the ODSs the day after his eighteenth birthday as he could to help fight the rampaging Covenant, passing with flying colors. During his time in the ODSs, he battled the alien empire on four different worlds and ten different engagements, eventually catching the eye of ONI, who made him an agent in 2546. One year before the war had ended; he was recruited into the Spartan IV program and was augmented as such. As a Spartan, Trip saw only two battles before the war had ended and wound up performing high risk missions against Insurrectionists, who were more than eager to resume their separatism. He knew that after the war had ended, there would be an increase of rebel movements as well as a possible second Covenant threatening the UNSC, who would be too weakened to respond adequately. Trip had decided to leave ONI and start his private contractor in late 2547.

He had talked with his handler, who had regretfully agreed with Trip's theory. He hated to lose his star agent, but also recognized the new possibilities that the contractor could give him. Talking with a sangheili that he had previously fought against and alongside, Vaal Talam, he agreed and brought several elite warriors to join Trip's cause.

At the time of the Guardian class frigate retirement, Trip had just started the, contractor known as the Strike Blades and was searching for a ship to use. He and the Blades visited multiple ports around the area, examining both UNSC and Covenant vessels. When he heard about the secret Guardian frigates being retired, he knew he had found his ship. Ballista was the only Guardian frigate to ever be put up for use. It was unusual, as the classified material was never revealed by ONI. He'd been forced to bid against two leisure companies who wanted to turn her into a casino and hotel. Although he still won, paying with much less money than he would have used to purchase a new ship.

The Ballista spent three months in drydock in San Jacinto on the colony of Vola, undergoing one of the most radical renovations ever performed on a ship. Without changing her outside appearance, she was gutted. The old propulsion engines were replaced by the latest cutting edge power plants as well as a slipspace drive with a Covenant design. The new propulsion gave her tremendous speed, which would take a toll on her hull, so drag fins and stabilizers were added. Inside, miles of wiring was placed to power everything from lights to the advanced ONI grade sensors.

Then came the array of weapons, with the firepower to rival a Halcyon-class cruiser, she was easily capable of taking on ships many times her size. Twin guided torpedo tubes, the newest version of the iconic MAC gun, several missile pods and 40 mm point defense guns. That wasn't all that she carried.

Aegis added other surprises too; her hangars were enlarged to fit a pair of Pelicans and a Phantom dropship, an extended armory from handguns to under carried countertank missiles. The Ballista was definitely overpowered, considering its size.

As for the crew, no expense was spared. Although the humans and sangheili had their separate quarters and accommodations, the Ballista's passageways and cabins for its forty personnel were as luxurious as a four star hotel with each operative given a budget to customize their room.

The funding for the refit and other new things had come from a hidden bank account of a corrupt Reach politician that Aegis was assigned to discourage his campaign. In the interrogation process, Aegis tricked him into giving up his bank account history to reveal his funds which were diverted away to himself. Technically, the money was supposed to be sent back to Reach's governor, but Aegis' handler had convinced them otherwise and Trip held the account as soon as he began to plan forming the Blades.

The Pelican docked inside the main hangar beside another Pelican and a Phantom. Once the shield doors activated and the main shaft sealed, the Ballista requested for departure from the Mortis System en route to Reach. During the trip back, the team had enjoyed a beer as a toast to their success at the hostage crisis.

Vaal and the elites headed back to their quarters while Aegis powered down the engines.

"Attention all hands. Prep for Slipspace jump."

The ship rumbled as the portal was opened and slipped through. The

hangar side door opened and another man walked through. He was shorter and slightly older than Trip, with brown eyes and thinning hair that was beginning to show gray. His age was beginning to show with a slight paunch.

"I've been noted of the account transfer from the Swarthmore authorities. The payment is complete."

Trip grinned, "You know, next time I'll let you have some of the fun. After all, what happened to the years on you?"

"It's not the years." The other man grumbled, self-consciously patted his stomach. "It's the pastries."

Andrew Rayson or Drew, was the second in command of Ballista and Trip's best friend. He had been with Trip and later Vaal once the former had conceived the idea of a mobile private contractor.

"Trip, you there?" A feminine voice asked over his line. He exchanged odd looks with Drew before responding. "Go ahead."

"We have a voice message that is only accessible to your identity. Although I think you should get some rest and a debrief before you hear it."

"Thanks Leah. Hold the staff in the briefing room and I'll be there after a shower."

Drew and Trip walked down the hall towards their quarters. The older man turning towards the bridge for monitoring and Trip locking the door to his cabin for a quick break. He strode into the bathroom and turned on the shower, letting the needle spray hit him with his head bowed.

After getting out, he threw on some khaki shorts and a dark blue polo shirt and headed for the briefing room. The room with the conference style table was only a few yards from the bridge, so that operations could begin almost immediately.

Upon entry, all that were present inside had stood up when he arrived. Normally the crew did not salute. He nodded to Leah Roush as he took his seat at the head of the table. She took her spot at his right and Drew sat on his left. Leah was a year younger than Aegis himself with shoulder length brown hair and blue eyes. Her short height gave her a slight disadvantage, but her voice prompted everybody to listen whenever she spoke.

"First off, nice job to all on relieving the hostage crisis. We didn't have much time for planning and it was executed with no casualties. Drew accepted the account transfer and your next paycheck will include your share of the money."

On the other side of the table were the other members of Ballista's main staff. The operation director, Vasili Suvorov, the best handler, Daniel Tyler and his partner in crime and weapon handler Luke Wilson sat opposite. Rounding out the staff were operation leader Conan Pyra and Vaal Talam and two other sangheili.

"I've been told that Leah has obtained a message that is only accessible to me. Let's hear it." She handed him a datapad which he

linked it up to the external speakers and activated the device. A small square indicated where he should put his eye up to. Once the scan was positive the reader was who he was, the audio began to play.

"I see that you've gotten quite the reputation from when we last met. Yet you still owe me a favor and I'm coming to get you and your crew in the next forty eight hours unless you do what I tell."

The voice was unfamiliar to Trip, but remarked that the two had met before. The team could trace a audio distortion in the recording, but it was masked too well to identify anybody.

"You are to meet me at the Burj-al Arab hotel in Dubai on the fifty fifth floor. The room you are to go to is number five five two seven. Once you are there, I will hand you further instructions. We will be waiting and monitoring your activity. This is a serious problem. Your cooperation is necessary."

The message then ended and self-deleted. Nobody in the room spoke for a few seconds until Vaal broke the silence.

"Harsh words spoken. Especially from a human."

Normally Aegis would get the jobs by a contractor working separately from the government. Often the deal was conducted through verbal communication. This contractor wanted Trip to come to him.

"I could see our operations getting in jeopardy." Drew said, "It won't take an amateur to find an ally that will agree to take us down."

That was true, over the years, especially with Insurrectionists; the Strike Blades had made foes out of them from sabotage to full out elimination.

"As far as I see, there is no alternative. As much as I don't like things being out of my control, we should probably follow this guy if we want to still operate freely."

"When we return to Reach, Vasili will be in charge of gearing us up if we need more to take on whatever this guy has." Trip began, "Drew and I will head to Dubai and work out our terms. I also will find out how this guy knows me."

The crew began to file out of the conference table.

"Do you think he's serious that he might come after us?" Leah asked.

"I don't know. Maybe I stole his toy when he was little. I would've been mad."

"Let's hope your welcoming party thinks the same." She chuckled before leaving.

* * *

><p>Now setting a course for Dubai. Tensions will rise and guards will fall as the Blades head to their next job they accepted

(forcefully)

****Aegis wears the HAZOP variant for the GEN2 armor. AKA the Halo 4 version.**
>

****A hat tip to anyone who gets the two aviation references that I put in here.**
>

6. Gathering Disaster IV

****UNSC **_**Ballista **_**in orbit over the partially rebuilt Reach****

****May 26, 2558****

It took a substantial amount of time for _Ballista_, to return to the Blade's main ground base at Reach. Despite both Mortis and Reach belonging to the edge of the Inner Colony title, the two systems were several light years away. The prospect of the mystery client wanting to meet at his own term annoyed Aegis even more.

When Trip sent the acceptance signal, the reply was near immediate, with the beginning terms already settled. Aegis did not even know what the mission was, or how much his contractor was even willing to pay. He had only accepted the contract to free the Northern Swarthmore crisis because the _Ballista_ had settled around Commerce, her sister world. This client was in Dubai on Earth and wanted Trip to come to him.

It meant that he had to dock the _Ballista_ at Reach and take a liner to Earth. _Ballista_ was a presumed decommissioned ship and was easily recognizable, especially around Earth. He couldn't risk arousing suspicion so close to his client, let alone one who forced the job onto him.

He had decided to take Drew with him merely to have his company on the long journey. That left Vaal in charge of the Blades while they recuperated on Reach. Completely confident, he could handle the ship just as well as his expertise with Covenant weaponry.

The UNSC fortress world was still much of a giant ball of glass. While there were obvious signs of rebuilding and terraforming, much of the planet was still quite uninhabitable. So far, the city of New Alexandria was the only urban area rebuilt, making it already bustling with the new FLEETCOM and ONI's Reach headquarters. After parting with the _Ballista_, Trip and Drew both headed to the New Alexandria transport department and managed to catch the next ship to Earth. Less than two minutes after boarding the liner, the giant portal had opened and they transitioned into slipspace. The journey was done in relative silence, with both men thinking ahead of what the next potentially dangerous task may be.

****Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Earth****

They landed at Al Maktoum International Spaceport, in the Jebel Ali district just west of the mega city of Dubai. The skyline showed some of the tallest buildings in the world including the Burj al Arab,

their destination. From the twenty first century to the present, Dubai was one of the most popular tourist destinations on Earth. Constantly, it held records of the tallest buildings, disregarding the space elevators.

As usual, customs were a formality. After flashing a private pass to the docking agents they were directed to the custom area. The uniformed security officer met them at the desk and carried an MA5D assault rifle. The Middle Eastern man glanced at them, gave a nod and beamed their electronic passports. He didn't even ask to see Trip's briefcase, not that he was concealing anything inside.

Though both had flown in casual clothing, they had put on suits and ties just before landing. Trip's jacket was navy blue and he had comfortable beige dress pants. A teal colored tie was wrapped around his neck. Rayson on the other hand, looked the exact opposite. His collar dug around his neck and the black jacket had a faint sign of a stain on his right sleeve, a final. Aegis looked at his watch, a shiny silver Seiko that was barely thicker than a sheet of paper. "We got an hour and a half."

Although offered a limousine, they took a taxi into the city. Rush hour had begun early, making traffic absolute horror, yet polite at the same time. Ever since Dubai had made itself known to the world, it was a heavily restricted area. Despite being part of the UEG, the region was much of a police state. Free speech was limited and possession of drugs meant years in jail. This created a population with such a sharp respect for the law that in the streets, nobody cut in line or flipped anyone off.

The shuttle car arrived at the front of the Burj al Arab, which rose in front. Resembling a sail, it remained unchanged for nearly five centuries. A liveried doorman waited in the lobby and had the door opened before the vehicle's tires had stopped turning.

"Welcome to the Burj al Arab." He spoke English with a cultured accent. Had he looked Scandinavian, Trip would have likely been greeted in perfect Swedish. "Is there any baggage you have?"

Aegis thumbed towards Drew, who was heaving himself out of the car, "Just him."

They entered the lobby, which had a magnificent view of all of the floors. Most others present were vacationers. Trip headed to the reception desk, passing a group of tourists that were getting instructions out of a Chinese guide that was no more than four feet tall.

He told the woman that there was a code for him. After showing his identification, she took his datapad and punched a couple of buttons. Handing it back to him, he was satisfied that the access code to the client's room was valid.

They had to show the armed guard at the elevator their code before proceeding. Trip presented it and they gained entry. The elevator ride was done in silence, save for the Japanese couple arguing all the way to the forty second floor. A faint smirk crossed both his and Drew's faces as they imagined that the husband had spent all the family's sushi money.

The fifty fifth floor dinged and opened up. It took less than twenty seconds to find the correct room. Aegis rapped his knuckles thrice on the door fifty five two seven.

The door opened up. A rather husky man stared at them through piercing black eyes. While they couldn't research the unknown client's background, it was just natural that this first impression gave out indicating that this was not their client. His jacket was off and his face wasn't overly aggressive. He was nearly as large as Conan Pyra, but unlike Pyra's face which was open and usually soft and easy going, this one kept a permanent look of disdain and scorn. The dark skin on his chin showed that he had shaved that morning, but already needed another.

"Mr. Aegis?" A voice called deeper inside the room. The burly gorilla stepped aside as a much smaller thin man came forward. He held a datapad in his hand and held it up as if taking a photo. Trip saw the green light reflecting off the face, which gave a slight relief that they had not walked into a trap.

"I see you are here. Stand down please." He told the larger person, his voice carried an air of authority. The hulking man grunted in response.

Hired muscle was Trip's speculation and it was a little too obvious. The good bodyguards were the ones you never suspected. Such people were ones that looked like bankers or business people, rather than the hulking wrestler types who assumed that their size was enough to intimidate anyone. The guard motioned for them to open their coats so that he could check if they were unarmed. Trip wondered if he was being raised because it seemed that he took the task of protecting his boss more seriously than letting him and Drew enter unmolested. To speed things up, the two members of the Blades indulged him. He didn't even bother to check their shoes and ankles. The only weapon they both carried was one M6J pistol each. He suspiciously eyed both men as he took the weapons, ejecting the magazine and setting it on the counter by the kitchen.

"Mister Aegis." The smaller man extended his hand, "Thank you for coming." He had come from a sofa at the back of the suite. The center sagged slightly, showing where he had sat. On the coffee table were several papers strewn about and a glass of amber liquid, most likely whiskey that was sitting on a coaster.

"This is Drew Rayson, my second in command." Trip introduced, shaking the outstretched limb. The client gave him a look of distrust, despite the warm outreach. The Blades commander returned the reception.

"My name is not important to you; however you call me Adamant. This is Steve, my personal security advisor." The big man only nodded slightly. Both Trip and Drew were indicated to sit. Adamant asked them if they wanted a drink. They responded with bottled water. After checking to make sure that it was sealed, Trip took a sip. It provided a cool crisp contrast to the warm humid air he had experienced in the last fifteen minutes. As Adamant went off to refill his drink, Trip took his briefcase, entered a code and it popped open. Steve had positioned himself so that he could see inside. Now the days of bug detector sweeping were gone. The tiny device in the center resembling an older PDA could instantly scan the

floor for eavesdropper. Adamant's suite was clear.

Just in case someone had a voice activated trap, he also had an electronic jammer inside. The small scrambler would disrupt unauthorized signals, but still keep him in contact with _Ballista_ if need be.

He took one last look outside at the beautiful view of the Persian Gulf and shut the curtains. "We're clear, now we can talk."

"Very well." Adamant sipped his drink, "The Storm Covenant is up to no good."

"They always are."

"I'm not sure you understand. From what the UNSC has been able to eavesdrop on their conversations, it sounds like they may be in possession of a superweapon."

Trip froze, "I'm listening."

"You hear on the news about the death of Jul 'Mdama?"

He had remembered reading an article in the news about on of _Infinity_'s top Spartan IV squad and how they had penetrated deep behind enemy lines to line up a fatal shot to the cult leader.

"The recon team that surveyed the assassination site after the kill found a hidden terminal that was not there before. They knew this because they did not see it at the exact spot on the helmet recordings. After accessing the terminal, it emitted a similar signal that the eavesdroppers detected. 'Mdama was there to find a superweapon that the first signal had referenced. At first, he was going to use whatever it was to try and erase all UNSC presence on Requiem, but now with his death, the newer leaders are trying to harvest it to avenge him."

"So, where do we come into this picture?" Drew asked.

"I want the superweapon out of the Covenant's hands!" Adamant replied, raising his voice slightly. "If they are serious about using whatever they are determined to find, humanity has the possibility of becoming at risk. Of course we could surrender, but the UNSC doesn't believe in that. This seems like quite a deal yes?"

"More of a forced order." Trip replied, "My estimate fee for a job this large would be," He paused, contemplating a number, "Forty five million credits."

"The money is not of my concern. I'm willing to double that." Adamant sharply responded, "It's the delivery. You don't do your job and halt the Covenant, then it won't just be the UNSC that should be watching their tail."

His face was mere inches away from Trip's, threatening and serious. Steve visibly hardened at his boss' rigid attitude.

"Deal." Trip deadpanned, the two men shook hands. Adamant picked up his datapad and swiped on the screen. Moments later, Aegis' lit up with a received file. "Your first start is here. Now is the part

where I say you have never met me and never heard of me.
Understood?"

"Clear." Aegis replied, already getting up to depart the room. Drew had packed up the jammer and detector followed behind, more than eager to leave. Adamant had allowed them to pick up their weapons. As they walked towards the elevator, Trip looked back to see Steve watching them as they exited. Once they were out of sight, he heard the door slam rather harshly.

"Well?" Drew asked as the elevator began to descend to the lobby.

"That Steve guy was pretty cagey."

"You know what was the reason why this Adamant guy wanted a face to face," He continued, "To intimidate us into doing the job."

"You know we have no choice." Trip snapped back, "If we want to keep up our one hundred success rate, then we can't do missions and be on the run at the same time."

The elevator opened and they were about to cross the lobby when Aegis mentally hit himself on the back of his head. His arm shot out and he grabbed Drew, turning him around.

"Are you alright?" His friend asked, Trip turned them around and they picked up their pace back towards the second lobby, which was a couple of floors up.

"I noticed a couple of guys sitting on a sofa in the lobby. Both were here when we arrived and look local, but when they just noticed us, they turned away a little quick."

"You think they're with Adamant?"

"I doubt it." Aegis called for the elevator by pressing both direction buttons, "If Adamant wanted us dead after the deal, he could have had his brute Steve shoot us as we exited. He also knows that the only place we would be heading to at this time would be the spaceport, so what's the point in trailing?"

Drew saw no flaw in his logic and rolled his eyes in response. He took his datapad and pretended to be doing something. Aegis used the corner of his eye to look at the black screen's reflection at their pursuers. One of them tapped his partner and discreetly pointed at the Blades duo. They began striding towards them and never took their eyes off of them.

The doors to the elevator had opened; both Trip and Drew shoved their way in, ignoring the indignation that the other guests gave them. It was too late for the chasers; the doors had already nearly shut when they had even got into speaking distance. They couldn't risk pulling out a weapon, so Trip gave them a taunting smirk as the elevator doors shut.

"Now what?" Drew asked as the feeling of heading upward came over them. By feel, Aegis was able to insert the magazine back into his M6J, he even managed to arm it without removing the weapon from his jacket.

"We get to the pool and lounge area, wait about five minutes and then go back down."

Drew took the opportunity as they stopped to let the majority of people off at the sixth floor to load his pistol. "What would you think their move would be?"

"Splitting up to cover the leisure areas, they'd never think we'd head to the pool."

"Who do you think they are?"

Trip shrugged as the light on the elevator approached the floor with the big pool. "My bet's on a couple of Innies posing as the local police. Perhaps for a little retaliation for something we did on Mortis a while ago."

"Do you think they're armed?"

"If you were trying to get back at someone for taking out your friends, what would you be carrying?"

The doors opened and they stepped out onto the massive pool. Built on the twentieth floor, it occupied nearly the entire building's floor space. People of all ages were talking, relaxing in the hot Dubai sun and splashing around in the pool. To their right was a bar and eatery, with vibrant colored shades over tables. Waiters navigated their ways around the maze bearing trays of exotic looking food and drinks laden with ice.

"Damn." Drew laughed softly, as a woman in a skimpy bathing suit passed by. They were close enough to smell the passion fruit scent on her tanning lotion. "I wouldn't mind spending a few days here."

"I could pop your eyes out if you ogle any harder."

Trip led the way to the back of the area, keeping a close eye on the second elevator. It dinged and caught his eye. His hand hovered over the pistol in his jacket. Emerging was a family dressed for a little time of fun in the sun. Instantly the kids ran to the pool and jumped into the cooling water. Trip saw the doors beginning to close and cursed when a hand reached out and parted them once again. It was them.

Luckily they had began searching in the opposite direction, near the bubbling hot tub, giving both men the opportunity to hide behind a few trees that served as dÃ©cor. As they looked in his direction, Aegis backed a little deeper. To escape, they would have to move at the edge of the restaurant and across a small strip of concrete to the nearest balcony. Unfortunately, a member of the restaurant staff or a lifeguard would likely catch them. They had no choice.

He had been able to use the side tree as a lever to boost himself up when an eagle eye lifeguard shouted at him to stop. He must have been observing the duo and knew they were up to something.

The two men were immediately alert and began to move towards them, despite them being out of their sight.

The lifeguard must have been on high alert, because he was probably calling additional security. Trip was nearly over the barrier and had grabbed Drew's arm to pull him up when the two men spotted them. One of them reached into his jacket and pulled out a nasty looking pistol. Trip saw him aiming and had only a split second act.

He dropped Drew.

Just as the gunman pulled the trigger dust from the wall puffed out where Drew had been hanging a moment before. People started screaming and rushing away from the tapping sound of the gunshots. More of acting on instinct, Trip had drawn his own pistol and returned fire, trying to disorient the gunman intent on hitting Drew and buy him some time. The man jerked from a shot straight to the base of his neck. He clutched it before falling over on the floor.

The second agent was already reaching into his jacket, where it was no doubt that he had his own weapon. Much to his surprise, Trip saw an explosive vest that was most commonly used by the Insurrection around Mortis, usually used in revenge attacks. The clamp would be on the center of the back so that the martyr couldn't remove it.

The bomber had already primed the vest and was about to activate the detonation when Aegis aimed again and fired, his augmented aim pinpoint on the open area of his chest. He fell back into the pool, the water muffling the vest's explosion. Still, water shot up in a geyser, raining down in a torrent. Now people began to flee even faster. Trip was in the middle of getting out when he heard a stifle.

The blast had created a hole near the edge of the pool and it had gouged a three foot diameter hole in the bottom. The force had blown the concrete underneath completely out and water was flowing through to the downstairs lobby at an alarming rate. Drawing closer to the gaping hole was a small boy, wearing float assist wings. His parents had likely ran off during the shootout and forgotten the kid.

Trip set down his briefcase and leapt over the barrier and sprinted across the pool, entering in a dive that would have impressed an Olympic judge. The current tugged and pulled at his body as if being in a riptide. Aegis was a strong swimmer and had often used it, ending up being pushed to the limit, but nothing had prepared him for the raw power that the surging water had towards the hole. He grabbed the kid, who flailed in his arms, crying beyond all reason and only served to make it worse.

It was too much, the water flow was pulling both of them much more than Trip was putting out. For every six inches he tried to gain, the invisible hand had pushed him back a foot. He looked around in desperation and saw nobody, not even Drew was aware of what he was doing.

Trip stopped swimming. He would only get one shot at his attempt. With all of his strength he hurled the boy onto the nearest ledge. His face got caught in the flow and he went under. Coming back up, he saw that the kid was on the concrete. He was nearly a foot from the hole and planted his feet firmly around the edges. His free hand reached out, trying to grab the concrete part that was not being pulled in. His hand grasped a pool ladder and he clung on with tenacity. Using his free arm, he managed to pull himself close enough

to keep both arms on the sides. He retracted his legs and climbed out, collapsing. The floor was scorching hot, but he didn't care, exhaustion flooded his arms and legs.

The boy was just getting up and through a stream of tears examined his elbow. It had been scraped when Trip had tossed him onto the ledge. Upon seeing the red cut and some blood seeping out did the kid begin to wail like a police siren.

He got on his feet and put on his jacket, retrieving his briefcase. He snatched up the kid and met Drew near the elevator. Drew shook his head seeing Trip soaked, but remained silent. He dumped the kid over by a set of reclined chairs that were far from the pool as they exited towards the elevators. They joined the mass exodus out of the hotel. When they reached the lobby, there was maintenance already surrounding the area where water was splashing down. Law enforcement officers and their cruisers stood by and watched for any suspicious faces or traits. Trip and Drew both let themselves be carried along the tide and luckily didn't raise an alarm because of their soaked clothing, most people leaving were wet to some degree. As soon as they exited the building, they briskly walked to the line of taxis and knocked on one of the cabs in line. The driver rolled down his window.

"Look." The driver began, "Until it's my turn, I can't take," He turned around and his mouth fell open.

Trip stood there silently, presenting one hundred and fifty credits.

"Al Maktoum Spaceport."

He didn't even ask about the blood stain on his teal tie.

* * *

><p>What an epic escape huh? Will the Blades keep their end of the bargain and carry out the mission? And who really were the attackers that caused so much chaos? Next chapter may provide some insight and the beginning of the seemingly impossible mission.

7. More Questions, Fewer Answers I

Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Earth

May 26, 2558

After what seemed like hours after dead silence, Drew was the first to speak. "So what the hell happened back there?"

They were en route to Al Maktoum International Spaceport. Every now and then, there would be a police vehicle with patrolling officers with assault rifles. Some of them were pulling over cars to do through inspections. Both of them knew that getting out of the spaceport was going to be a challenge, the better the perpetrators were caught in the vicinity of the incident, and the easier the task was before it got out of hand.

Trip did not immediately answer his friend's question. Instead he had removed his datapad and frowned upon seeing that he neglected to remove it before entering the pool. Drew saw his predicament and handed over his damage free pad. Trip nodded his thanks and contacted the space travel company. He immediately booked two priority tickets on the next flight to New Alexandria. The flight would leave in an hour which meant plenty of time to get back since traffic had considerably lightened up since their arrival. He hoped that the air traffic was not delayed because of the incident. They were stuck as soon as Dubai's Spaceport closed down. Of course they could take a car to the nearby Abu Dhabi spaceport, but the longer they took the bigger chance that spaceport also closed all outbound movements.

"I think," He finally answered Drew's question, "That we were at the wrong place and wrong time."

"Really?" The Blade's second in command arched his eyebrow.

"Yes." Trip held up a hand to hold off his next comment that was rich with doubt, "If this Adamant guy wanted us dead, he would have had his muscle. That Steve guy shoot us."

"Okay?" Drew replied, seemingly agreeing.

"Another thing that puts him in the clear is that the message that he sent us before we even left was just about as legit as they come. So that puts him in the clear."

"I can't believe you're saying this."

"Hey. Just because Dubai happens to be one of the cities with the lowest amount of terrorism doesn't mean it's not a target. The hotel is a shining example of UNSC wealth. Any Innies worth his salt would be drooling to blow it up. We just happened to be there when it happened."

Drew didn't look convinced but nodded, seeing what Aegis had pointed out.

Trip had the driver drop them off a couple minutes from the spaceport. Both were still wet, but they had walked in the heat to help dry off.

Ships were still taking off and arriving as normal when they entered the lobby. The watchful, but unsuspecting policeman at the security checkpoints told Trip that the security was not alerted about the attack. Some people threw them odd glances at their wet clothing.

"Our taxi hit a fire hydrant." Trip explained.

Boarding the aircraft held little trouble and since he had purchased VIP tickets. The Blades were escorted to the luxury cabin by an attractive Malay girl and were entitled to return to Dubai soon. Shortly afterwards, they had received the report of Dubai's international traffic had been shutdown long after they had broken from the atmosphere. The time where the sleep rhythms kicked in when the ship jumped into slipspace so the two men changed out of their suits into comfortable dry sleeping gear. Trip's skin was cold and stuck to his shirt, making it difficult to remove it.

"Still." Drew said after the long silence and both were laying out their seats for a comfortable bed. "I'd have to say that meeting went better than expected." He called an attendant for two bottles of beer and they clanked the ice cold drinks. Drew's was light, which still meant he was battling his waistline.

"Nevertheless. Next time this Adamant guy and I cross paths." He made it sound slightly ominous. "I will be the one to ask a few questions."

* * *

><p>New Alexandria International Spaceport

May 29, 2558

Trip and Drew arrived and boarded off of the aircraft. After collecting their bags and bidding goodbye to their travel hostess, they were back in the familiar lobby. It was nearly midnight so the cool and crisp air felt amazing to both of them after being inside the ship's cabin for a while. They took a taxi to their base, which was over by the UNSC shipyards. Trip smiled as he saw the familiar ghostlike form of _Ballista _sitting in drydock.

"Welcome back boys." Leah Roush had been the only one to come and greet them once they passed their palm scan to gain entry. "You have a thing for finding trouble don't you?"

Drew jerked a thumb at his best friend, "Blame him. That guy attracts nothing except terrorists, gunmen and bombers."

"Don't forget the ladies." Trip reminded him. He turned to Leah, "What's the latest update about the attack?"

"Some group hailing from the planet Mortis has claimed responsibility for the attack. Kind of worries me since we just got back from there. How'd your thingy with the mystery client go?"

"He told me that unless we take the mission to find a Forerunner superweapon, we are all going to die because of the Covenant harnessing it. What was the aftermath of the attack?"

"No deaths so far and only three injuries, mostly because of blunt trauma. The main blasts that the bombers used were standard Semtex, the stuff that has been used since the twentieth century. The identity of the terrorists haven't been recovered according to the enforcement there. Both Luke and Dan say that they can hack into the mainframe, but didn't sound too certain."

"Tell them to lay off." He responded, "It would have been more dangerous if someone tossed a live grenade into the trash can. I'd hate to have thought of the death toll if Drew and I weren't there."

"It's hard being hero every day." Drew muttered, moving off to give his techs their orders. Trip went to a public shower, feeling exhausted. Leah moved to follow him.

"Sorry." He groaned, rubbing a knot in the back of his head. "I need

a shower and some substance. I feel like an action figure dressed like a doll."

"Not to mention your clothes are still wet." Trip had put back on his wet suit once they got off the ship.

Forty five minutes later, combined with a long shower and a hot moa burger from an eatery, Aegis returned the briefing area. Both Dan and Luke were on the screen watching some sort of video with cats. Vaal and several of his sangheili warriors were conversing with Pyra and a couple of ODSs and Spartans. Everyone looked up as Aegis walked in, followed by Leah and Drew.

"First order of business is that my trip to Dubai was an order to accept a mission that has been forced upon us. Our client is a guy that told us to call him Adamant." At the mention of his name, Drew began typing on his datapad and on the main board popped a picture of their associate.

"He gave us a mission to locate what the Storm Covenant had on a Forerunner superweapon."

"So then what's your analysis of this guy?" An elite named Rak asked.

"What Drew and I believe is that this Adamant guy is actually a client that works for ONI."

"Hmm." Leah put her hand to her chin in thought, "So we're probably working for the office again."

"We know how that all went." Drew reminded them.

"As I was saying," Aegis shot him a glare, "Although the mission seems private, the job will ultimately benefit the office. As much as I want to call him back and tell him the deal's off, I think that it's serious concern. If the Covenant are going this far to get a superweapon, I'll believe them."

"So where do we start?" Pyra asked.

"Sangheilios."

* * *

><p>Sangheilios, Urs System

May 30, 2558

The homeworld of the sangheili species looked hellish from space. Although there were red oceans and some areas of vegetation, most of the planet's surface was rust colored. A multitude of ships dotted the area. Some were small freighters, moving cargo between systems; others were the frigates and massive CCS heavy cruisers. Ever since the rise of the Storm, Sangheilios had been a warzone. With the Servants of Abiding Truth controlling a large section of the southern hemisphere, the civil war never officially ended. Human populations on the planet were relatively small, mostly researchers and scientists. Aegis had only been to Sangheilios once, deployed as UNSC reinforcements to Vadam Keep where he met the Arbiter Thel

Vadam.

"We're being hailed by the cruiser _Guiding Spirit_ on our presence, stay and destination." Dan Tyler reported from his station. The bridge of the frigate was in a semi circle, with stations around the commander's seat.

"Tell them that Sangheilios is our destination and that we are here on Naval Intelligence business." Rayson told him, "If that doesn't work, tell him that we are authorized under code seven seven nine zero."

Dan relayed his message and grinned in response, "We've been cleared."

"Alright here's the plan. If the ships nearby order you to do anything, comply. The region is highly unstable and if they do initiate an assault, you best stay out. Vaal, I and Rak will be heading down the destination for answers."

"What did the waypoint even tell you?" Luke asked.

"Someone who could explain whatever the Covenant is so eager to go after."

* * *

><p>Enjoying it so far? Please review and favorite! I appreciate feedback!

8. More Questions, Fewer Answers II

****Kopar Keep, State of Rolam, Sanghelios****

****May 30, 2558****

"T-fifty two designation three eight eight; you are cleared to land on platform B. Welcome to Zamam."

"T-fifty two three eight eight acknowledges." Vaal responded, thumbing the controls in the pilot's seat. The crew had taken the Phantom instead of the standard Pelican to avoid suspicion. There was less attention drawn to a Phantom than a Pelican flying in Sanghelios skies.

Aegis and Rak descended from the lift as Vaal powered down the engines. After the dockmaster approached he handed him the activation instrument and a few notes of currency to refuel and rent a dock. Vaal jumped down once he secured their ride.

Sanghelios was truly an alien world. Aegis had never been on the home planet of the elites, for human presence was welcome, but not common. There were almost eight billion sangheili living here, not counting the moons. Most of the humans that resided on Sanghelios were researchers and UNSC personnel stationed in Vadam Keep. The sky was reddish and dotted with white clouds. Heat shimmered across the surface. Aegis began to think twice about going back to Dubai after coming here. He felt his armor cool down and keep his temperature at a stable level.

"Following our guide?" Vaal asked, bounding to them.

"Yeah." Aegis double checked his waypoint, "We're here to talk with Hoda Rolam, a former officer in the Covenant and an expert on the Didact and his Prometheans."

"This is connected to the Forerunner superweapon?"

"We could always ask the Storm." Trip teased, Vaal shook his head.

"You lead."

"That's what I thought."

They walked through the main area of the keep, keeping careful activity for anyone following. The state of Rolam was more rural than its counterpart of Vadam. The fields to the left of the large building were growing large stalk like plants similar to bamboo. There was a farmer using what looked like half of an energy sword to cut down the stalks. The only difference between the two blades was that the farmer's tool was metal. The stalks went down by rows, divided by irrigation gutters of the rust colored water.

To their right was most of what a town on Sanghelios would have been called. Groups of buildings dotted the landscape as the keep; a well-built stronghold loomed at the back of the complex. As they approached the town, the inhabitants looked at them and as if no surprise, went back to their tasks. The market was similar to ones on Earth, with open vendors and different goods. Although Aegis recognized some products such as the stalk product in one vendor, there were much different things being sold. Vaal chuckled at his confusion upon staring at a large gutted mammal carcass and pieces of meat strewn over the display.

"Doarmir. The pelt keeps the wearer dry and warm." He smiled at something, most likely a memory. "Good meat too, especially when mixed with spices."

"Well you'll have to introduce me to it sometime."

They reached Rolam Keep and were welcomed in by the lone gatekeeper after being asked what their business was. Inside, the fortress was tidy yet intimidating. Sangheili bustled around on their tasks. Most of the locals inside the keep were governors, guards and military personnel. In one corner was a motor pool with a slightly open door. Aegis could see a parked Wraith and a pair of Ghosts inside. The steep walls towered above with a narrow walkway for sharpshooters to fire at invaders. Rak had explained on how the clans often feuded. The fight was over once an invading clan had controlled his opponent's keep. It was no coincidence that the state functioned similar to a kingdom, with the towns as the inhabitants and the keep as the castle. There were more than thirty five states on Sanghelios, with the last name of a sangheili indicating which state they inherited with each one producing proper sangheili to serve in the military. Vaal for example, was from the state of Talam, one known to produce the best commanders and shipmasters.

The three had nearly reached the house of the keep when the door was

flung open and a small sangheili child ran out. His eyes were wide with fear as he began talking in the local tongue, of course to Aegis sounded like gibberish. The youngling saw the Spartan and began to utter a word when Vaal lunged forward, clamping his hand over the kid's jaws. Fortunately nobody was looking as they walked towards a corner. Vaal held the sangheili child in front as he knelt down at eye level. Aegis turned on his translator so that he could understand the conversation. Rak had his Beam Rifle drawn and was watching for eavesdroppers.

"I'm going to let go of your mouth and you're going to tell me what's wrong." Vaal calmly told the youngling, "Understand."

The kid nodded and Vaal released his vice. He looked a little nervous at the sight of the Spartan but stammered a few words first. "It's a bunch of guys with guns! They broke into our house and are asking my mother all these questions!"

Vaal and Trip glanced at each other when the child told them. Vaal turned back, "Who's your mother?"

"Iere Rolam."

Iere Rolam was the wife of Hoda Rolam, their contact. It was puzzling on why Hoda was not mentioned by the kid.

"Is anyone else being questioned?"

"Just my mother." The kid sniffled back a couple of tears, trying to stay strong, especially in front of a two warriors and a demon.

"Why isn't he mentioning his father?" Trip asked in English.

"It's custom that our people do not know who their true father is." Vaal explained, "It's done to avoid favoritism." He turned back to the youngling, "I'll take care of it. You stay here until I say it's safe to come back."

He nodded in response. Vaal motioned for Aegis and Rak and they approached the keep. The doors opened and they moved towards the main chambers where Iere was being questioned. There were servants moving through the hall where a table was laden with food, most likely for an evening feast. Trip nearly knocked one over as they sprinted. He had to admit that he was a bit jealous that even after his augmented body; he still couldn't match the running speed of both Vaal and Rak. Both elites quickly got ahead as they ascended the floors.

When they arrived at the main hallway, they found Iere sitting in a chair. If nobody else was present, they would have politely announced their arrival, but unfortunately she was not alone.

Another sangheili held out the glowing energy sword. His armor was maroon colored and four blue lights on his helmet. Surrounding him was a golden armored elite, two blue ones and a few grunts that squealed excitedly in impatience.

"I say again." The Zealot growled, having little tolerance to her. "I demand to know where your husband is!"

"Listen here you infidel." Iere's voice came back with equal tension,

"I have told you ever since you barged into my keep that my husband has been missing for three years!"

As they continued to threaten each other, Trip raised a hand, extending his fingers backward. Rak nodded and drew his Beam Rifle, aiming it at his first target.

"The Zealot's mine." Vaal confirmed.

"Don't get cocky."

As Iere continued to be defiant to her captors, Trip watched with anticipation. The Zealot had his arm around her neck and she was pinned against the wall. Slowly, he began to inch the glowing sword to her eyes. Aegis targeted the nearest blue elite and sprinted forward, pulling its head back. The larger Covenant warrior growled in surprise and tried to dislodge him, but his grip was too strong and he sharply twisted the head to the left. A satisfying pop indicated a broken spine. Dropping the body, he raised his assault rifle and let out a stream of bullets, noting that Iere's interrogator had lost interest in her. The first two unlucky grunts went down easily and the second elite's shield was shredded. As he flinched from a drained shield, Rak fired his beam rifle. The elite toppled over from the particle shot that ripped through its skull. Two other grunts followed suit, becoming the sangheili sniper's next victims.

Vaal had stealthily moved around in the seven seconds of combat previously. He flicked on his energy sword, his camo module turned on to mask the ignition sound. When he found an opportune time to strike the warrior elite, he moved. Like a graceful, yet lethal fighter. Vaal struck out with his arm in a hammer swing, completely catching the warrior off guard. It was the only small defense break he needed to shove the sword through his stomach. The weapon singed as it needed the briefest contact to burn through nearly any material from concrete, battle armor or flesh. The warrior didn't have time to say anything before being impaled and fell down after Vaal had withdrawn his weapon of choice. He didn't wait for a reaction before lunging at the Zealot. Although caught unaware, the Zealot rolled to the side and growled at Vaal in the native tongue. As if a pair of Roman soldiers, the two struck and parried blows. Vaal was much faster and easily evaded the Zealot's powerful, but slow sword slashes.

Somehow, the Zealot had gained an upper hand and forced Vaal to let go of his sword to save his hand from being dismembered. Vaal grabbed the sword arm of his adversary and tried to disarm his opponent as well. The Zealot slammed a fist into him in response. He moved to Vaal, whose hand had found his fallen blade. He raised the blade in a quick motion and swiped at his head. Anticipating the move, the Zealot jumped backwards, but wasn't able to avoid the sword's tip, which scarred the helmet in twin burnt gashes. As Talam rose for another attack, the other elite parried and performed the same maneuver to disarm him again. Vaal fell for it a second time. The Zealot chuckled slightly and moved to the sword to kick it out of Vaal's reach.

Trip had just put the last grunt down with his rifle when he saw Iere lunge forward, tackling the Zealot. He barely budged from the attack and raised the sword in her direction. As a result, she backed off.

He turned back to Vaal.

Suddenly a beam cut straight through the shields, making him stumble back. He whipped his head in surprise, an expression of rage and vengeance. Rak smirked and raised the beam rifle again.

The shot pierced the eye piece, cutting a clean hole through the helmet. The Zealot's corpse lurched upward as it went limp, dropping the sword. With a thud, the body hit the ground, steam coming out of the armored helmet.

Vaal snarled, standing up quickly. After Trip gave an all clear signal, Rak came forward as well.

"You looked like you were in trouble."

"I had him right where I wanted him." Vaal replied, extending a hand to help Iere up. Rak and Aegis rolled their eyes and moved over. Their armored feet nudged the nearby corpses to ensure that they weren't feigning death.

"You are Iere Rolam?" Trip asked, "Wife of Hoda Rolam?"

"Yes." She straightened to her full height, which was a full head above his own. "I apologize for having my home in such distress." Aegis could easily tell that she was a strong being, both physically and mentally. She was the image of what he thought a female elite would look like. Much like her human counterparts, Iere sported a slimmer and more slender figure. While male elites were large, bulky and strong, females were shorter and seemed to be much more agile and acrobatic.

"Don't sweat it."

"I thank you for coming to my rescue." She continued, "They had broken in my keep, imprisoned our warriors and asked me about my husband."

"So who were these fanatics?" Rak asked.

"They said that they're with the Servants of Abiding Truth."

That name was very familiar to them. The Servants were the predecessor to the Storm Covenant. Founded by a former field master, it was reformed into Jul 'Mdama's renegade remnant force years later after waging a bloody and ongoing civil war. Just the name of who the attackers were associated with already told them that they were on the right track.

"I assume you're here to ask similar questions about my husband's research?"

"Yes." Aegis smiled, "Only I won't hold you under the blade of a sword."

"Why don't we step in the hall? I will get servants to get us some tea and a light meal." She turned to another door and walked towards it, the three males following uneasily.

"Do we have enough time?" Aegis asked Vaal as they walked.

"Not sure, I think we'll be overstaying if this exceeds an hour." After hearing this, Trip looked at Rak. "Head back to the docks and pay the dockmaster for another while." The elite nodded and bowed to Iere before leaving the room.

"We don't have much time." He reminded their host as they came into a vast room centered by a table. On the walls were gigantic murals of ancient drawings of elites fighting and one particular side of the wall of the battle against humanity. That wall had an image of a Spartan pushing an energy sword through an elite general's abdomen.

"I respect that." Iere replied, "But if you want to know everything, you're going to need to stay for a while."

Both Trip and Vaal exchanged glances before he flicked the safety on his assault rifle, slinging it to the magnetic plate on his back. "We've got time."

* * *

><p>Next chapter will mostly be about finding out what the Covenant are so interested in. It was quite difficult writing about Sanghelios due to the fact that I don't know that much about it. Thanks to the Internet, I envisioned it with the society of warriors, such as European kingdoms and Japanese Bushido with the combination of a lifestyle of a hot desert.
**

9. More Questions, Fewer Answers III

Kopar Keep, State of Rolam, Sanghelios

May 30, 2558

"Impressive." Vaal remarked, taking a bite. It was only a small slice of a dark red fruit that was nearly as large as a watermelon. When Trip had tasted it, he nearly gagged from its sour and bitter taste. However he actually learned to tolerate it because of its sweet aftertaste. Vaal and Iere did not seem to be bothered by it, likely because of sangheili taste being different than a human's. Aegis did however try the wine and found it tasting very similar to burgundy made back in the UEG. He smiled, politely declining another offering of the fruit from a servant. The male sangheili was elaborately dressed and had a smaller build than the ones seen in the military. He looked like a lost soul, but had an open and relaxed posture.

"I have to ask." Trip began to his host. Iere was deep in conversation with a servant when he started talking to her. "These servants seem like they don't want to be here." She listened intently, "Are they slaves?"

She laughed softly, "No. Despite what you see as an impoverished person, these servants chose to work in the keep. Our species rarely used slavery with the exception if the Unggoy. You see, as a keep, we must sustain a suitable population in the state. Anyone is welcome in if they pitch part of their work into our community. Some choose to stay with their professions such as merchants and combat instructors. Others serve in the military and families seeking the life inside the

keep will become servants and the caretakers. Not only do servants provide us with necessities, they also carry out messages as well as other things that the keep's lord can't do by himself. The servants you see here have chosen their occupation. I try not to discourage or impoverish any if possible."

"You know, this reminds me a lot of kingdoms back on Earth." Aegis added, "Seems like both elites and humans have more in common to begin with."

"Human history is as bland as it is fascinating." Vaal told her, "I apologize for going off topic, but could you tell us about your husband's research?"

"Of course. I have a lot to show." Iere began, "When I first met my husband, he was just starting off in the Covenant. He had graduated from the Rolam War College with studies in the archaeology of our gods. We married just as the word of humanity's discovery came. Hoda was then whisked off and I was left to raise our four children. He was very successful as a frontline soldier, earning many human kills to his credit."

"I'm guessing that Hoda's successes got him the archaeological area?"

"Precisely," Iere said with her head down in somber for her husband, "Hoda was then promoted to a high archaeological director. They gave him the Ultra title and sent to several invaded human worlds that had recorded finds of our god's remnants. He commanded a small group of other likeminded elites, jackals and grunts for research. He was granted temporary leave after nearly twenty years of being out and spent the last week here, which was the last time I saw him."

"Did he tell you anything about what he discovered?"

"He did. His discovery of more artifacts got him a position onboard a frigate as the secondary Shipmaster or the executive officer in human tongue. Under his guidance, he discovered a device used by the Didact."

"The Didact." Vaal repeated the word to Aegis, "The most powerful and influential of the gods. Finding it could have finished the war in our favor."

"So what prevented him from finding it?" He asked, sipping more of the wine and accepting a refill from the flower shaped pitcher offered by the servant.

"He found a diagram of what the Didact called a Composer. This was used by him hundreds of thousands of years ago to convert humans into his personal army, the Promethean constructs."

"The Composer?" Aegis asked, "The Didact was awakened about a year ago and used it on Earth before being stopped by the Master Chief."

"During the war, about a year before our kind rebelled against the Prophets, Hoda's ship came under attack by a human battlegroup. Although he managed to escape, the shipmaster was killed. Acting on the Prophet's orders, Hoda began searching for the Composer and

finally found a location of where it was. He had found it on a planet inhabited by the gods that was now derelict and desolate."

"I'm a little confused here. The Composer was found on a Halo. You say it's actually on a Forerunner Shield World?" Iere raised a finger to silence his next question,

"You humans are quite impatient." She stood up, calling for a servant. "We're finished here. Please clean the table up and prepare for dinner. I will be showing something to our guests."

Trip and Vaal followed Iere further down the hall, passing by other sangheili that gave the Spartan looks of surprise, but nodded politely as they passed. It struck him that even though they were likely told that humans, Spartans in particular were in association with the devil and dubbed "demons" they still showed a lot of respect. Perhaps it was more of the fact that they were aware of the peace between the two species.

Iere paused at a section in the wall and waved her hand in front of a circular section. The pad pulsed purple as a section of the wall opened. She made sure that nobody else was watching before beckoning for them to follow. It was a narrow corridor with dim lights and smooth metal walls, just like what was on Covenant ships.

They entered a chamber with rows and rows of what seemed to be tablets. Lights twinkled at various intensities, making it seem like an infinity ceiling. Trip's mouth opened in awe, while Vaal chuckled to himself, having seen a keep's archives many times.

"Here." Iere held out several tablets with the runes of the sangheili language. Although his translator only was able to decipher spoken languages, Vaal was easily able to read it.

"I appreciate your generosity." Aegis commended, "Is it alright that I can copy this to my datapad and have it back with us when we leave?"

"Of course Spartan."

The name struck him off guard; there were few sangheili that dared to call any Spartan their respective title. Often, he was called Demon, despite being allies with them.

"Hey!" Rak's voice cut in, "You're about to have company! There were a couple of drop pods with a dozen grunts, some jackals and a couple elites! A Zealot is leading the force."

"Roger that. We can spring an attack before they reach the keep's hallways."

"Well you better hasten! They will invade the inner chambers within the next minute!"

Iere looked back to the heated banter, "What's going on?"

"Storm reinforcements." Aegis answered, "They must have not heard from their buddies and are coming in a bigger force, thinking that they were wiped out." He tapped on his datapad some more, fully downloading the information. "Does the keep have an armory?"

"Yes." Iere took off, followed by them. Vaal took a small moment to peer outside. Sure enough, there were masses of Storm Covenant advancing on the keep. The grunts moved in a pack while the stealthy jackals prowled around like predators. The elites kept a watchful eye on the lesser races and the Zealot in front raised its energy sword in his left hand, a needler pistol in his right. The elite unlocked another door down the hall and it slid open to reveal a cache of Covenant weapons crates. Trip's assault rifle was nearly empty, so he discarded it and chose a plasma rifle, grenades with a carbine. Vaal kept his sword, but helped himself to some grenades.

"You ready?" Aegis asked Iere, she expertly inserted the caddy into a pair of needlers and clicked them. The familiar glowed pink, indicating that they were armed.

"I've been dying to use these." She excitedly as they moved to have a vantage point in the courtyard.

"Rak, are you at a good high point?"

"I am. But the zealot is out of my view."

Aegis nodded, Vaal would deal with the officer. "Engage."

The Covenant force had nearly reached the hallways when Rak targeted his first victim. A purple beam cut through an elite's skull and his shields popped before falling down. The grunts stopped, looking at their fallen warrior before raising their arms and running around, screaming. Both Trip and Vaal armed a plasma grenade and tossed it at the small aliens. The explosives hit the back of two grunts, adhering to their methane reserve tanks before detonating and cooking off the gas, which wiped out three jackals beside them.

The elites roared in anger and growled, trying to rally their scattered troops for a counter attack. Iere rose from her hiding position, targeted a commander and held down the trigger on both needlers. A stream of pink spikes spat out of the pistols, accelerating towards the target. The elite jumped to the side, but was too late, as the needles adjusted their path and began sticking to him. The needles combined and detonated, sending the body a few feet away caused by the blast. Aegis fired his carbine at another elite commander. The elite dodged a few of his shots and returned fire with the newer rapid-fire storm rifle. He adjusted his aim before ducking as a flurry of plasma rounds impacted the wall in front of him. After a second, Aegis aimed again, firing three shots, finally breaking the shields. Another three rounds punched through the armor and one impacted its elongated headdress. The elite dropped down, with his finger still on the storm rifle's trigger. The weapon fired a few blue shots before resting beside its dead user. Vaal had jumped down with his sword already powered. He rushed over to the Zealot, who had only a second to perform a half of a slash. That was all he got before Vaal easily evaded the move before tripping his opponent and delivering a fatal blow by impaling him through the stomach. Another thin beam cut the air, killing a jackal hiding behind his shield.

Aegis and Iere jumped down as well. She swung her needlers at a jackal, which stood no chance and was thrown back. Aegis stiff armed the last elite, who howled in pain from the blow from having the wind

knocked out of him. He easily took advantage of the stunning moment by forcing the plasma rifle up his mandibles and squeezed the trigger. The heat from the discharge was felt even through his armor. Releasing his dead opponent, the face was barely even recognizable from the charred flesh that the plasma had cut through. All was silent as he breathed heavily to regain his breath.

"Okay. Threat is eliminated." He got green clear lights from his elite partners. Looking at Iere, who couldn't help but grin, it looked like him when he first joined the Spartans, enthusiastic, lethal and eager to start a fight. "You're not bad."

"Bad?" She lamented back in a teasing manner, "I've probably been trained in fighting longer than you've been alive."

Trip laughed, "I suppose so. We can offer you a ride to a safer area if you want." The familiar Phantom came into view, as Rak guided it over. The green gravity lift activated and Vaal stepped into the light, effortlessly being raised into the bay.

"I appreciate your concern Spartan. However, my keep needs me to govern. It has been a miracle from the gods that I've still been able to stay in power. Come, I will walk you to your ride out."

"Your information will be most helpful. I can't thank you enough. Is there anything we can do to repay you?"

"If you can, please find out what happened to my husband."

"Will do." Trip pulled Iere towards him and embraced her in a hug. She seemed quite surprised and awkward.

"It's a human way of saying that you take care of yourself." He explained as he released her. The Phantom accelerated away from the Kopar keep and went skyward.

"Really?" Vaal asked once Aegis was now in the sealed cabin.

"What?"

"You know exactly what."

"He's jealous." Rak revealed from the cockpit's seat. The other sangheili shot him a death look, but he ignored it.

"I disagree with that statement!" He declared, "Although I find her most attractive."

"I thought you were married." Trip inquired.

"Swordsmen don't marry, but are allowed to mate with any female of their choice."

"Learn something new every day I guess. Was she a pick for you?" He asked Vaal. Rolling his eyes in response, he opened the cockpit door and stared at the screens as the blackness of space began to fade into view.

"I have enough children as is."

* * *

><p>We'll be changing a bit to the Covenant side for the next few. For those who want to see some ship to ship combat, you're gonna get your wish.

10. Retrieval I

****Well to start, I have good news and bad news.****

****The bad news is, it's Lent. That means that us Roman Catholics (myself included) are to abstain from something we find enjoyable until Easter. So therefore, I will not be posting anything for a while.****

****The good news is that during the hiatus, I will still be writing and may even be five or more chapters ahead. In addition, I am announcing a second installment that will be out very soon. New story means new characters! I will be wanting a few new members of the team, specifically a sniper, knife fighter and demolitionist. Please message me if your interested and I will send you further instructions.****

* * *

><p>Sanghelios, Urs System

****UNSC _Ballista_ in orbit over CK-782
>**

****May 30, 2558****

"That concludes our briefing." Aegis leaned back in his chair. The senior members of the Blades staff were around the table, over a meal. The human members were consuming a fantastic beef Wellington while the sangheili ate doarmir stew, a popular dish on their homeworld combined with several spiced vegetables and grain.

"The coordinates that Iere gave us pointed to a system?"

"They did." Drew answered, "The location from what the records show, is that this is a former Forerunner outpost that was overrun by the flood."

"So it's flood infested?" Pyra asked.

"I'm not sure about that, but if we arrive when the Storm begin searching for the Composer, they'll have to battle the Flood. We could easily go in and do a snatch and grab."

"Although it doesn't make any sense." Vasili Suvorov furrowed his brow, "I don't understand why the Covenant are so interested in a weapon that doesn't benefit them. The Composer only destroys humans to create Promtheans. Unless they want in increase in Promethean forces, the results are quite farfetched."

"Maybe it's not about the idea of more Prometheans." Trip replied, "The Covenant were so fanatical about the Great Journey that if one

thing resembled something to their gods, they'd be scrambling over each other to get it. These guys are no different, especially when reading the leader's threatening messages to humanity."

"Well keep digging in the network. The closer we are to the Forerunner outpost and the Covenant task force, the better we are at getting a shot of the Composer." Aegis settled in the captain's chair, running diagnostics.

"Systems green?"

"Executive area checks out." Drew responded.

"Communications are clear." The com officer replied, placing a pair of headphones to his ears.

"All weapons are locked. Missiles cold and the MAC system is offline." Luke Wilson reported.

"Nav, I'm sending you the coordinates. Spin up the drive and let's get going."

"Roger that." Dan Tyler complied, pulling a lever with his left hand while tapping a series of buttons with his right. "This is on the edge of the galaxy! Our estimated time of arrival is two days and three hours."

"Then, that'll have to do."

Outside, the Ballista split open a section of space to reveal a blue and white sphere. As the portal expanded, the frigate made the jump.

****Storm Covenant CPV-class Heavy Destroyer
Forgivable****

****Covenant Fleet orbiting Forerunner Outpost CK-782****

****June 1, 2558****

Shipmaster Abae Kasam blinked as the infinite slipspace view began to slow and the familiar twinkling of distant stars took shape. With the jump complete, the pyramid shaped bridge lights began to glow back to their familiar state, as the _Forgivable_ used an older slipspace model, due to what the Storm could salvage from the ship graveyards. Many decommissioned vessels as well as some that the Covenant deemed unworthy to serve now comprised the growing fleet.

Kasam had a nasty temper, especially for insubordination. Unworthy crewmembers usually met their fate at the end of his sword. Physically, he was not an intimidating figure, with his Zealot armor being slightly too big for an elite his size. Serving as the second in command on a Covenant frigate during the war, when the Great Schism broke out, he and his forces were deployed alongside brutes in an artifact excavation on a moon of the planet the humans called Reach. Luckily, the brutes at the time were unaware, but still managed to kill Kasam's commander. Taking over, he led a glorious battle against three brute packs with the grunts, elites, hunters and jackals that stayed loyal to him. At one point, a War Chieftain scoffed at his small stature and saw what his stomach looked like in

Kasam's blood soaked hand. He was upset at the Arbiter's partnership with humanity and chose to flee with the few ships that agreed with him. Humans were tenacious fighters, but still insects under sangheili heels. Over time, they still hunted brute fleets until they had word that the war was over. Afterwards, Kasam happened to meet the Servants when they began their assault and joined in, despite them telling him otherwise. Jul 'Mdama had later met him personally and he offered his resources to join his cause, which the Didact's Hand graciously accepted.

Although the _Forgivable_ was not Kasam's ship, he had been put in charge by Jul 'Mdama of the operation. Shortly before the attempt on his life, 'Mdama had stumbled across records of a flawed copy of the Composer that was not as powerful as the one the Didact used on Earth, but it still performed its job. Kasam was personally there with 'Mdama when the Didact first fired the Composer at the human research station. Needless to say, it was a weapon of mass destruction, specifically engineered for human demise. He was instantly impressed.

After communicating with the Didact about the Composer, he also mentioned a second, but less powerful version that could be used if something were to happen to the improved version. Jul said that he would find it eventually and after six months, assigned Kasam with overall command of the task force sent to harness the old Composer days before he was assassinated.

"Shipmaster." The operations officer called out, "We are now attaining orbit above the planet."

Kasam had temporarily taken control of the _Forgivable_ from the current Shipmaster to begin preliminary operations. Although he had reluctantly agreed, Kasam's activated energy sword made him much more enthusiastic before the operation was even announced to the fleet.

"Good work. Reduce our heading and activate our scanners. We must find any hostiles that will interfere with our progress."

The officer typed into his console and studied the readings, scrolling through the results at a speed that Kasam couldn't possibly comprehend. It showed that he was a veteran and not new to the task.

"Infection rate is surprisingly low, although most of it is around the Composer."

Kasam peered over the shoulder at the display, sure enough; the flood had the strongest presence around the Composer's marked location.

"Weapons, prepare a cleansing beam in a circular mile radius."

"What?!" The weapons officer gasped, "Shipmaster, you can't be serious."

"I am."

"Shipmaster, even within a mile radius, we could still damage the

Composer!"

Kasam coolly eyed the officer before striding over and reaching to his hip and pulling out the hilt to his energy sword. With a flick in a half second, he had the tips of the sizzling plasma blade at the base of the other sangheili's head. His expression unchanged and the sword's glow combined with its crackling noise made for an eerie ambiance, even for Covenant ships. The rest of the crew had turned to see the drama. He spoke again, in a gritted and forced voice, trying to conceal the anger he held at the insubordination.

"Move us into orbit and prepare the cleansing." He smiled smugly, his sword arm holding perfectly still. "Or I could tell the command that the mission went with only one flaw."

The officer paused for a second before turning away and powering the _Forgivable_'s energy projector. The small Zealot smiled as the beam warmed and a lance of energy arced down and began carving through the surface of the planet. Another destroyer had taken position once Kasam relayed the order and began completing the second half of the glassing perimeter. The ground glowed white hot from the plasma. Smoke billowed from what little organic material happened to be in the path. He felt no sympathy for whatever happened to be living on the planet, flood or non. Both destroyers had carved half of the circular barrier, making the usual hour process cut in half.

"There is no doubt that some infections will still be around the Composer."

"Indeed." Kasam replied, "Prepare our Phantoms and a Lich for a ground LZ secure. I will head down to personally lead the attack on the Composer."

"Yes Shipmaster." Forgivable's Shipmaster stood from his seat, with wide eyes after a double take at his station's radar, "We must hasten! A human ship has exited behind us!"

"What!" Kasam shoved him aside to look at the display. True to his word, there was a vessel behind them. A quick scan from the Shipmaster revealed that it was a frigate class. He scoffed, discarding it as no real threat.

"That's child's play. Deal with it at once!"

"What about you? This Composer! Where is it going?" The Shipmaster asked, slightly afraid at what Kasam was going to do. However his fear was slightly replaced by relief. Kasam was halfway out the door when he turned around with the menacing look he was known for.

"I heading down to retrieve it. To your second question, it's going on my ship."

UNSC **_Ballista**_

"Slipspace exit confirmed." Dan Tyler reported from navigation. "Detection of four Covenant vessels, two destroyers named Forgivable and Merited Salvation. There is also two light corvettes, but I can't get much records on them."

"Don't bother with that." Aegis responded, tapping on controls. "All

that matters is that they're a threat." He regarded operations, "What are the destroyers doing?"

"They're enclosed around a two mile diameter area and appear to be establishing a perimeter. Also looks like the two corvettes are on an intercept course."

"Then we'll have to take them out. Weapons, prepare," Aegis was cut out by Luke.

"Another contact, this one's much larger!"

Trip pulled up the scanner and surveyed the new Covenant ship. The classification was a CCS cruiser. The ship was easily shadowed its UNSC counterpart. Forming the backbone of the Covenant Navy, one ship was a serious threat already. Preying on that fear, the Covenant often tasked CCS cruisers to travel in threes or more, leaving little to stand a chance against their onslaught. The cruisers carried multiple plasma torpedoes, which cut straight through any UNSC starship as well as pulse lasers for point defense. Aside from weapons, the cruisers carried entire armies of Covenant that were battle ready for an invasion. The energy projector on the ship's ventral side provided a ruthless orbital bombardment and served as the Covenant's primary ship for glassing a conquered UNSC planet.

"Tyler, are you able to get the records off of this one?"

"I am. This is a CCS class, armed with the standard from that intelligence has gathered. However, a scan showed a smaller than average crew and most components present on other ships of this class are missing. The other ships have been chatting about it a lot. It's called the Blessed Composition."

* * *

><p>Once again, thank you for viewing! Until next time.

11. Retrieval II

Hi everyone, I'm back! Now with my hiatus over, I can go full speed ahead and get this done! During the absence, I have written six more chapters and estimate that there will only need to be four or five more afterwards. My guess would have to be that there are around 20 or 21 chapters. Updates will once again be regular, as long as I find ample time to add on.

* * *

><p>UNSC _**Ballista**_

June 1, 2558

Aegis studied the Blessed Composition through the bridge viewer. The sleek vessel had been a CCS designation, one of the most feared Covenant ships, shadowed by the larger Assault Carriers and the gargantuan Supercarriers. Assault Carriers were often seen as the Covenant fleet flagships and could easily hold their own even against

the CCS ships.

On the other hand, the fabled Supercarrier was the stuff of legends. So far, there appeared to be only a handful of these ships. Easily dwarfing the massive Assault Carriers, these ships could decimate nearly any other ship thrown at it, UNSC or Covenant. A single Supercarrier was easily capable of staging an entire raid on a UNSC planet. So far, to Aegis' memory, only one Supercarrier was destroyed by UNSC forces. A group of stealthy infiltrators had malfunctioned a slipspace drive and severed the vessel in half.

There was no way Ballista was equipped with the weapons for taking down a Supercarrier no matter how modified it was.

He might as well have regarded the new cruiser as a supercarrier. The most noticeable difference aside from its darker blue color that nearly made it invisible was the large opening that slanted to the stern on its dorsal side. The axial side showed multiple Covenant devices and adapters. Wires seemingly tangled inside were placed at the back of the opening. Upon zooming in on the appendage, the purple glow shimmered as a small crew of grunts in vacuum suits mingled around the consoles under the watchful eye of an elite.

"Commander." Dan Tyler brought him out of his thoughts about the cruiser. "We have the two corvettes on an intercept heading. I'm reading them powering up their point defense cannons."

"Helm, slow us down slightly. Wepps, warm the MAC and get the Archer missile safeties off."

"Aye sir." Both men began tapping on their stations. The Ballista's engines dimmed, slowing her pace down. With the bridge crew's eyes glued to the display, Aegis was glad to see that the enemy ships didn't change their course. The smaller guns on the side began to glow their familiar purple, nearing their firing status.

"Ah! Come on! Work!" Luke Riley banged his fist on the table, Trip sharply looked in his direction.

"What are you doing?" The commander was leaning over with his hand partially on his chair to steady himself as the Tyler shifted over.

"Teaching David a new trick."

David was the name of Luke's weapon firing computer. Because Ballista had no onboard AI, he had installed a supercomputer. Named after the android from the 21st century film *Prometheus*, it served as a replacement. Riley often used it to more than just handling his station whenever there was no combat.

"I don't have time for that!"

"Enemy plasma rounds fired!" The bridge shook as the first few rounds impacted the ship's shields. Since its conception, Ballista was fitted with improved energy shielding with extreme resistance to plasma. However if the corvettes weren't dealt with, the shields would down and the Guardian frigate would be as vulnerable as a standard UNSC light warship.

"Shields down to eighty four percent!"

Aegis pushed on the throttle as the Ballista slowed its heading. Purple and white streaks accelerated right in front as the missed shots passed not ten meters in front of the bow.

"MAC is primed and ready to fire." Riley reported.

"What's the second corvette doing?"

"Moving into a flanking position and powering on her lateral turrets."

Aegis sighed, "Arm the MAC and take aim at the flanking corvette."

"Aye sir." The Ballista's MAC muzzle glowed red as it began to charge its powerful MAC gun. Unfortunately, the Magnetic Accelerator Cannon was an unguided weapon and was unable to lock on to a target. Luke's eyes were glued to the reticule as the corvette came into view.

"Fire!" Aegis shouted. The targeting was not even on the hostile vessel yet.

The ship shuddered as the massive tungsten projectile exploded out of the bow. Within a split second, it connected to the corvette. Smoke covered any view of the enemy vessel. Leah was the first to gasp when the visibility cleared.

The corvette's armor flashed a light around the entire body of the ship that flickered away a moment later. It was outfitted with an energy shield.

"Damn." Drew snarled, "Shields?" It came as a huge surprise, as both corvettes were the SDV type, a ship that previously lacked shielding during the Human-Covenant war.

The corvette's guns fired again. Daniel Tyler however, didn't even look scared as he calmly guided the ship through the salvo. The rounds were close enough to see sparks being thrown off. One found its mark, but dissipated since the shields had slowly been recharging.

"Looks like they've been busy." The comms officer noted.

"We'll have to improvise." The commander affirmed, "Prep torpedo tube one and lock target."

"We've got more problems," Tyler called from his station, "the second corvette is warming up her port side turrets as well."

"Fine then." Aegis had turned to him to give another order when Drew suddenly cut in. "Cut all engines and keep us parallel to the corvette's starboard side."

"Would you mind telling me what's going on?" In a situation like this, Aegis only felt secure when he was in command of his ship.

Dan and Drew exchanged a nervous look before the latter explained,

"It's complicated stuff. Just wait and give me the conn commander."

"Don't 'commander' me you crafty bastard!" Aegis studied the tactical display, starting to feel a slight sweat on his palms. The flanking corvette had about thirty seconds before its weapons had a lineup of Ballista. All eyes were on the second Covenant ship as they saw the purple plasma shots get larger as the weapons were fired. Then Aegis realized Drew's plan, they had to time it right or the Covenant ship would adjust its aim if they moved and it would nail the frigate as it tried to dodge the salvo.

"Wepps, shell the flanking corvette with a few. Helm, warm the engines."

The plasma came closer, streaking across the space between them and began getting brighter as if anticipating its target. On the starboard side of the ship, the 40mm antiaircraft point defense guns blazed as it fired the thunderous rounds at the shielded ship. Lights shimmered as the rounds impacted harmlessly across the barrier before finally giving out, sparking over from the shielding depletion.

"Go!"

Tyler's hand slammed on the throttle as the engines quickly burned and Ballista shot with incredible speed out of the way. Since these were not the homing type, the trajectory could not be altered once it was fired.

Trip grinned as he saw the plasma accelerate closer, missing Ballista by a huge margin.

The unshielded flanking corvette saw the incoming barrage and already had tried to take evasive action. Unfortunately, it was too soon. The plasma shots impacted the port engines, shutting them down in a fiery purple explosion. The lack of propulsion had brought down the corvette, where the remaining plasma impacted and melted through its armor. The heat still radiated as the ship rolled to its side, with the destroyed hull being barely recognizable.

"That bought about sixty seconds." Aegis was already moving to square two as he allowed a small mental celebration. While some considered him to be a brilliant naval officer, he politely declined a rumor from a naval junior officer that he would be the next Jacob Keyes. "Lock torpedo onto the plasma cells by the turrets."

"Torpedo locked." Riley pulled back the trigger, "I'm ready to fire."

"Fire." The metallic firing sound exploded from beneath the ship as the guided aerial missile was catapulted out of the bow, just below the MAC's muzzle. A thin wisp of white trailed behind as the torpedo accelerated towards the corvette.

In response, the Covenant corvette's turrets charged up, just as expected. Luke toggled the plasma fire on David and the torpedo automatically made adjustments to avoid the deadly blasts. In vain, the corvette's engines whined at a higher pitch in a last resort to avoid the torpedo, but it was too late. The torpedo, with nearly five

hundred pounds of high explosive material slammed into the plasma storage. Being volatile fuel for the corvette's turrets, the plasma ignited instantly creating a massive fireball that scorched the entire starboard side of the ship. The explosion imploded slightly and then burst out again, completely shutting down the shields. It rolled to its starboard before smaller explosions rippled through the sleek hull before slowly breaking apart. No escape pods were detected.

He smiled, Drew's plan had worked, the intercepting ships had failed in their task and now were merely a cloud of shattered metal drifting in space. The bridge crew let out a cheer with Drew's normally emotionless face cracking into a wide grin.

"Excellent work everyone!"

"Leah, monitor all Storm chatter. Hail me once you get anything."

"Got it. Just be careful, there's some Flood readings down there."

"Now let's get down there before the Covenant take our toy. Let's prep the Phantom for infiltration."

* * *

><p>Destroyer _**Forgivable**_

It was not an unusual sight anymore that the bridge crew of the Forgivable had on their faces.

Even Kasam was aghast; a single human frigate effortlessly eliminated the ships that he ordered to intercept and deal with. During his days as the secondary Shipmaster on the frigate, human vessels were hardly even a threat by themselves. A corvette could easily give any UNSC common vessel a run for their money, save for the more powerful cruisers. These ones were modified with better plasma weapons and energy shields for the sake of the gods!

The Covenant had landed seven Phantoms on the ground with a group of Lich gunships at the dock where the dormant Composer had been left for nearly a hundred thousand years. Although surrounded by an energy barrier, most of the dock had flood material all over it. Kasam was among the first to descend from his Phantom's gravity lift. The unholy screeches of the flood were already audible, followed by the plasma cannon fire as the grunt gunners blasted at the abominations. The first victims writhed as they lay at their final resting place.

Fortunately the flood were few in number with the barely recognizable species. The ugly combat forms sprinted ahead with groups of infection forms scurrying behind. Kasam carried a needler in one hand and his sword in the other. He raised his weapon and held down the trigger. The stream of needler rounds quickly buried themselves in the rotten flesh, causing the combat form to explode. Kasam covered his helmet with his arm as greenish fluids splashed on his armor. An elite growled, raising his storm rifle and firing plasma into the following infection forms.

"We're going to have to fight our way to the Composer!" Kasam shouted to his troops. He spotted a combat form taking a massive leap towards him with his whiplike arm outstretched. With a swift motion, the small Zealot seized the form as it landed and prepared its attack. Kasam easily jumped with his legs evading the tentacles. With a roar, he drove the sword straight through the flood's abdomen. Looking back, the other troops stared at him in awe as he tossed the dead flood behind him. At once, the elites began to join him, barking orders to the grunts and jackals. Kasam stood by as the groups began to pass and battle their way inside. Surveying the borders, he relaxed slightly as the glassing had not been too far away with a complete encirclement around the dock. Knowing that the Storm leaders don't like to be kept waiting, he frowned, kicking a chunk of rotten flood as far away as possible. If all went well, then his merit on Blessed Composition would make him an idol in the Storm.

The high pitched screech of the Flood snapped him out of his thoughts as he turned back to the dock to rejoin the fight. As he jogged along, he noticed another Phantom descending to the other side of the Composer. It aroused his curiosity, but shrugged it off as he rejoined the fight.

* * *

><p>Enjoying it so far? Rate and review please!

12. Retrieval III

****I noticed that I made an error a couple of chapters back. Chapter 10 to be specific. It says the Forerunner world CK-782 is located near Sangheilios in the Urs system. That is not true, CK-782 is located in rather uncharted space.****

* * *

><p>Forerunner World CK-782

****June 1, 2558****

Although it did not appear as magnificent and pristine as the improved version had been on Ivanoff station, the Composer was still quite an intimidating object. Covered in the tan colored biomass of the parasite, its radiant glow emanated beneath its sickly covering as if calling out to Kasam to free it from the parasite's grasp.

He looked around at his fellow Storm members, surrounded by fallen flood corpses they too looked with eyes wide. Grunts shook nervously while the Jackals remained quiet. Several elites walked over to Kasam.

"Orders?" Asked a Warrior named Lhet.

"I'm going to move the Blessed Composition into place to retrieve the Composer. Start removing as much filth from the weapon as you can. I'll give you an hour." He handed him his energy sword without waiting for Lhet's reply before heading into open air. His two separate warrior accomplices glanced at each other and lowered their storm rifles as he stopped beside a Lich.

"Let's get going." They were lifted onboard, Kasam setting course for the _Composition_, that was making its way over the horizon.

"Sir," One of his guards walked over with a chatter set. "There's a transmission from the ground team."

* * *

><p>"Hot damn!" Leah raised a fist as the bridge crew got a front row seat of the second Covenant destroyer getting shattered into thousands of fragments, surrounded by the smoky trail of another anti-ship torpedo. "Aegis, the destroyers are down and the cruiser has moved into orbit. Be advised that I will not be able to cover you if anything goes south."<p>

"Got it, hopefully if we can't stop it, we can at least delay the retrieval. If they get and move out of orbit, you have my permission to blow it to hell." His voice sounded a little on the static side, but still held the firm commanding voice he was known for.

Onboard the Phantom, Aegis, Suvorov, Vaal, Pyra, Rak and an ODS named Hamed underwent their final checking of their weapons. Instead of the Misriah handgun, Aegis had his more favorable Acheron A9 handgun. With nearly the same statistics as the M6H that was UNSC standard issue, the A9 instead chambered a lighter round that was able to fire faster. In a way, the A9 would also punch through body armor, in some cases, where the M6 series was unable to. His A9 complimented his BR85 Battle Rifle.

The team descended through the gravity lift, surveying the steep rocks ahead. As soon as his boots touched solid ground, the cliffs immediately lit up in a flurry of green and blue bolts as the ambushing Covenant troops opened fire. Aegis fired shots from his Battle Rifle perfectly into two grunts, who died quick deaths and toppled over the cliff. Pyra's rocket launcher coughed out the explosive, wiping out the entire right side of the Covenant troops. Immediately, Vaal and Aegis continued to fire with their rifles as the other members took cover at the base of the cliff. Exited chatter from the grunts and a panicky growl of an elite alerted them that reinforcements were inbound.

"Alright, we need to delay the Composer's retrieval. Rak and Hamed will set up sniper overwatch and report any new activity. The rest of you will come with me and we will eliminate Covenant patrols one by one." Both Rak and Hamed nodded before pulling on climbing equipment to scale the tall rocks.

Aegis had Suvorov on point as the three Spartans and one elite approached the first group. At once, they raised their weapons and opened fire on the group of grunts. The disgusting ground was painted with the luminous blue of the grunt's life liquid. Once they had been dealt with, Aegis led the team up to the dock.

The biomass encircling the Composer was cleared significantly by groups of sword wielding elites. It sat in the center of the circular structure and was flanked by four long structures. Overhead, the low pitched whine and purple skin of the Covenant cruiser increased in volume as the circular area of its belly suddenly opened up, sending a beam of greenish light down. Once the beam was connected to a pad

by a group of grunts, a lance of jackals started jumping down the gravity lift. Their descent was slowed when they neared the pad so that they didn't fall to their deaths.

"Sniper." Pyra murmured as they peered at the sight from behind a few rocks that were above the dock. The jackal with a red light inside its helmet looked around in an alert fashion and brought the oversized purple beam rifle to its head.

Off where Aegis couldn't see him, Rak squeezed the trigger with his beam rifle's reticule centered on the jackal's tiny helmet. He had been watching the overgrown chicken for a full minute and concluded that the sniper's search pattern was about to hit the other members of his team. The needle thin high velocity plasma entered the jackal's skull and exited the back of its head, going through another jackal that had the misfortune to be right in his line of fire. Both fragile aliens collapsed with steam emanating from their points of where they were shot. Instantly, the elites stopped scraping flood away from the Composer and snarled at their troops, most likely to locate the sniper. Aegis and his team hunched down as several patrols passed by. As the last elite was about to step over the small trench they hid in, he rose from his hiding spot, slapping a lighted plasma grenade to his boot. The sangheili minor growled in surprise once he was across the trench and realized that the sticky explosive was attached to him. The grenade detonated, taking a score of grunts with him. Vaal rose and fired his carbine, taking out the remaining grunts. More patrols were suddenly en route to their position and the Blades responded accordingly. Vaal leapt out of the trench, blocking an elite's storm rifle from crushing his skull and twisted the arm. He slammed the elite on the ground and finished him with his carbine. Pyra fired the rocket launcher at a group of grunts, their methane tanks ignited from the explosive and drained the elite leader's shields, enough for the big Spartan to put a magnum shot down his throat. Vasili shot a jackal with his assault rifle, causing it to flinch in pain from the giant bullet. He was quick to take opportunity to bring the butt dead center.

Aegis had enough momentum from climbing to grab onto a Warrior elite in mid air. With his hands grasping as tight as he could, he pulled him to the ground. Predictably, his alien opponent tried to elbow him and as such, Trip yanked the arm backwards while planting his left foot at the base of the neck. An audible pop came from inside the body and the elite's muscles relaxed. He dropped the arm and raised his rifle, continuing to land shots on the advancing grunts and jackals.

"Aegis!" Leah's voice cracked through his comlink, "The cruiser is powering on her lifts!"

"Do something to stall them!"

"I can't! If I miss with the MAC by a single degree, it'll wipe you off the face of that world!" He didn't doubt that. Looking above, the Ballista was already descending and pointing the MAC barrel at the cruiser. Leah must have resorted to lock on weapons because the cruiser was hit with a swarm of Archer missiles. They did little to affect the ship itself due to the energy shielding shrugging off the barrage.

Immediately the cruiser came to life. The lift's green glow

surrounded the blade shaped Composer and it pulsed even brighter. A plasma turret glowed with energy and it pivoted to Ballista before firing a long stream. Daniel Tyler maneuvered the frigate around the beam and continued her set course.

On the ground more heavy troops were beginning to engage them. They were pinned at the rock by four elites holding the normally mounted plasma cannons underhand, their muscles bulging from the heavyweight. One elite; likely the ground commander weaved from side to side, firing a fuel rod gun rapidly. One round hit the rock Aegis was hiding behind and he returned fire over the part that was melted off. One elite quickly fell to his hail of rounds, hands still on the trigger of his cannon as he dropped dead.

A vibrating sound grew even stronger as the Composer shifted from its dock, for the first time in nearly a hundred thousand years. It rose upwards as the ship continued to apply power to the gravity lift. Ballista had moved alongside, firing its antiaircraft artillery to try and dislodge it. The cruiser was fighting back as well, with her side lasers glowing purple hot and firing at full speed. Fortunately, Ballista's shields had taken the brunt and she continued her attack, weaving through the lines of lasers when possible. Vaal looked up as he removed the energy sword from the abdomen of the last elite. He let out a roar as the lift sealed over the Composer, which was now fully inside. As the pad's lift shut off, the cruiser fired another plasma round at the giant glass wall before the engines whined to move the ship out of orbit.

The heat boiled and dissolved the very barrier that the Storm had once used to keep the Flood off them. Although not visible, the team already knew that on the other side, there were rushing parasites, more than eager to explore the previously restricted area.

Aegis hoped that the Phantom would be ready to go in five minutes. The Flood would probably be all over them in six.

* * *

><p>Oh how I love cliffhangers! Reviews are welcome too!

13. Stowaway I

****CCS-cruiser **_**Blessed Composition **_**leaving orbit****

****June 1, 2558****

Kasam growled in irritation as the Composer's connector cords were being attended to by a group of sloppy grunts. For nearly fifteen minutes, the Covenant cannon fodder were tinkering with the machinery. He speculated that not all missions where you serve as the commander on are always enjoyable. Techs had already set up the adapter sockets once the weapon of mass destruction was pulled aboard and the process was painstakingly slow. Shadows danced on the walls as the grunts' plasma tools lit on the cables, hooking them up to the sockets.

Bored with their slow progress, the small Shipmaster grabbed a quick meal in the ship's galley and returned to his office. The quarters

were quite spacious compared to the ones he had on the ship during the Great War on Humanity. His desk had a few consoles that scrolled with details at an astoundingly quick rate, mainly from his last report on the interrogation of Iere Rolam. On the right side was a type-51 Directed Energy Rifle-Improved. Known more commonly as the Plasma Repeater, the weapon was Iruiro Armory's proposed successor to the aging Type-25 Plasma Rifle. Being pretty much the standard arm for the sangheili armed forces for quite some time, the Covenant wanted a faster firing version. The Plasma Repeater was then produced, only in prototype just in time to be put into service during the invasion of the human world Reach. Cancellation of its longtime production was announced after only a few thousand were made. Kasam was issued one aboard his ship and has kept it ever since. Now, with the war over and the value high, one plasma repeater was worth more than the price of four needlers and still rising. Still valuable, they were overlooked in favor of the T-55 storm rifle that the Storm Covenant adopted making it into more of a trophy. Kasam took the weapon from its stand and proceeded to aim it. Satisfied with the familiar feeling, he placed it back and continued his successful report to his superior.

"Shipmaster," His comlink came to life with the voice from the secondary shipmaster, "We're encountering a technical problem. The Composer is not linking up with the bridge controls."

He gave a sigh, clearly displeased about the fact that he had to leave the peace of his office again. "I'll be right there."

Most other crew knew that something important was going on. Kasam briskly walked down the hallways, passing other members. Grunts quickly moved aside, well aware of what would happen if they impeded his path. Other elites gave him a subtle nod offering him clear passage well before he got within eye locking distance.

The axial weapon room was a large open space with a longer barrel and the storage area that resembled half a pyramid. The Composer was locked into place by twin pylons, which also served to draw its energy in order to fire. Because it was in the vacuum of space, Kasam had one of the elite rangers off duty to borrow his suit. Stepping out into the void, he nervously moved around, not used to the weightlessness and observed the anchor for one of the tethers keeping the Forerunner weapon in place. He found himself moving without effort and realized that he was drifting. Quickly activating the suit's magnetic boots, he managed to settle himself on the deck.

He saw the secondary shipmaster rush over to greet him. Triggering his jetpack, he met him halfway, letting the low gravity environment do most of his work.

"We're having problems running tests to power the Composer. The controls at the bridge are not communicating properly. I've been asking Putum to start the powering, but the weapon fails to respond."

Putum was the bridge officer responsible for the weapons on Blessed Composition. One of Kasam's fellow officers aboard the frigate before joining the Storm, the two knew each other well and were good friends.

"Get the maintenance to finish attaching the cords and start powering it up for our first test. I want to get rid of that human ship before they warn their fleet."

"Shipmaster," the secondary officer repeated, drawing a deep breath, "Even if the uplinks were done now, the Composer would need a significant time to begin charging before it can be used!"

Suddenly a low rumbling echoed further down the ship's stern, the entire vessel shook as the shields flashed. The human ship had fired a MAC round that was deflected. Grunts squealed, nervously looked around, trying to find the threat, but the secondary shipmaster's glare sent them back to their tasks.

"Time is of the essence." Kasam ordered, "I'm off to prepare the weapons for operation."

He walked back inside, beginning to hurry to the bridge.

Another tremor struck the ship, much greater in intensity from the last one. Kasam looked up to see a large metal wall collapsing on top of him. Without even having any memory of doing it, he lashed out with his arms in a resort to catch the burning debris. Gritting his teeth as he caught it, he lifted the heavy plating off to the side, exhaling harshly as his muscles ached from the lifting. Alarms blared, dimming the lighting to nearly pitch black before the auxiliary kicked in, providing the halls with a much less luminous visibility. Kasam now sprinted to the bridge, taking the time to avoid the damage control grunts and jackals clad in fire retardant suits to combat the damage. He burst into the bridge, which was a flurry of activity and shouldered his way over to the ops. Elites rushed around the panels flashing a multitude of colors.

"What has happened?" He addressed the ops officer.

"Human ship had penetrated our shields! They are moving to a second attack vector!"

"They're trying to take a shot at the holy weapon." Another officer murmured nearby before regarding his shipmaster for the next task. Kasam sat in his chair, "Weapons, prepare a pulse laser volley set three zero in front of the human vessel's bearing! Navigation, charge the slipspace engines and dial in the coordinates that I'm sending you."

"Yes sir." Both officers began moving their hands at their stations. The navigation officer frowned, repeating his action before clenching a fist and turning from his post.

"Shipmaster, the slipspace drive is not responding. I think that the human ship damaged it in its attack."

Kasam cursed, now stuck in a sticky situation. The plan had to be carefully executed and the longer they waited, the greater opportunity that success would slip from their grasp. "Get the repair teams out there and tell them to get the slipspace drive coupled as soon as they can!"

He triggered one of the monitors to regard his naval opponent. As Putum fired the wave of pulse lasers, the ship weaved through the

bolts, responding with a burst of auto-fire from their point defense weapons. The move wasn't overly aggressive, but gave them warning of their trickery.

"Putum, begin powering up the Composer and funnel the shot onto the human vessel's bridge."

"Excellency!" He protested, eyes wide, "The weapon isn't fully operational yet!"

"Are you attempting to defy me?"

"No excellency, I'm trying, but it's failing to do its part." He laid his head down in defeat and pulled a holographic icon over to press it. On the _Blessed Composition's_ dorsal side, a pair of barrels lined the upper half of the ship as the energy from the Composer was channeled into a focused blast, similar to the Promethean Binary Gun. However, because the Covenant data on the Composer was vague, they did not develop pylons to effectively direct the shot, thus requiring a horrendous amount of time to power up.

"New contacts, the human vessel have released three boarding pods!"

Kasam paused for a second; curious on why they had launched a boarding party. It was definitely odd on why they would fire in a means to destroy the ship before attempting to capture it. The odds were definitely against their favor if they succeeded in getting on. Of course they would damage and wound before she would be boarded, but the Composition's shields were already back up to full strength and the human ship had only chipped away a part of the shields.

Putum's hands were on the pulse laser controls, ready to shoot them down. However, Kasam raised a hand. "Let them come."

"But they could recapture the Composer."

"Unlikely," Dismissed it with a wave of his hand, "That type of vessel is outfitted with multiple attachment craft, but chose to only launch three. I want the entrances to the Composer and slipspace chambers locked down and bolstered with reinforcements. Once I leave to repel the invaders, seal the bridge doors."

"I understand."

Abhe turned to the secondary shipmaster, "You've got control, inform me once you get an update of any kind. We have a tight schedule and don't want to miss our window at striking."

"Count on it." The secondary shipmaster replied as he settled into his chair to examine a report.

He exited the bridge and turned back to see the doors close and the lighted outline turn red, to show that they were locked. Of course he had an access chip, but stationing heavy forces to guard the most important part of the ship would easily give its importance away. That purpose would also apply to the Composer and slipspace chambers, but by the time they spend trying to figure out the significance, Kasam would find them. Both areas were quite a distance from each

other, but still would be the first areas he would check.

Immediately, he spotted four sangheili clad in gold warrior armor lurking by the armory, leaning on the wall as if a bunch of thugs. Their jaws moved fluidly with their breathing and really large arms that had probably crushed human skulls. One gave a slight grunt and the other three turned. Kasam felt their eyes survey him. All four towered over his small stature and the aggressive stare made him feel like being in the presence of Helioskrills.

"Now," He addressed them, "Let's find out what our visitors seek."

The four warriors growled before heading to the armory to collect their tools of lethality.

14. Stowaway II

****Onboard _Blessed Composition_****

****June 1, 2558****

If Aegis had to give the Covenant any credit for anything about their starships, they were clean.

Maybe it was just a habit for any captain, UNSC or alien to maintain a presentable vessel. He had been on some filthy ships that were mostly freighters and not accessed by anyone. The _Ballista_'s crew maintained a weekly cleaning schedule. Nearly everything accessible to all members, from the engine room to the kitchen was thoroughly inspected and tidied up. Having such a good cleaning habits wasn't much of a direct factor, but it still made the crew feel a little more comfortable, despite being on the ship for the majority of their lives.

They had launched three boarding pods at a rapid speed at the fleeing cruiser in hopes of sabotaging it. Only one of the pods contained his team in case the ship decided to take the narrow opportunity to shoot them down. Trip knew they wouldn't fire because at such a close range, the moving debris had enough kinetic energy to seriously damage the ship. Whoever the shipmaster was, he seemed very prideful about his ride.

With a bone jarring halt, the pod had impacted a hangar, boring through the catwalk separating two dropships and caused one of them to explode in a blue ball of flame from cooking off its unstable engine. Aegis and two ODSs named Wheeler and Hamed were the first to remove their harnesses and emerge. Equipped with silenced MA5C Assault weapons, they opened fire, quickly killing the maintenance crew, which comprised of a handful of grunts. Silence descended over the hangar bay only being broken by a hissing sound from the destroyed Phantom.

"Drew," Trip keyed back his COM, "We're aboard. Move the _Ballista_ back and out of range."

"Negative. I'm not leaving you to be turned into orange dust!"

He sighed, "You don't have much of a choice. If you don't relay the order to Leah, all aboard will become orange dust and share my fate."

Over the connection, he heard Drew's annoyed voice shouting orders at a replacement helmsman to get them away. His concentration was broken by the rattling sound of gunfire, followed by a pained cry of a jackal. Peering outside, he saw Hamed standing over the reptilian soldier holstering his weapon. Smoke trailed out of the muzzle from its recent discharge.

"How much explosives do you have?"

"Explosives?" The ODST of Qatari descent checked his pocket finding a few pounds of the highest grade and a small detonator. The small amount he was carrying was among the most volatile and expensive materials that the UNSC had in its arsenal, save for nukes.

"We're going to target the Composer to before the Covenant decide to make any use of it. Pyra, Tyler, Vaal and I will be heading to the fuel cells to start the leakage to help accelerate the explosion while the rest of you clear out the area by the Composer. Inform me when you are in position."

"Got it." The teams parted without another word, with the four operatives finding a door to the hangar's left. The purple door flashed its lights to acknowledge the presence and slid open. Trip realized that he forgot to apply his helmet and jammed the HAZOP piece over his head, quickly securing the seals as his HUD confirmed that the suit was airtight and in prime condition.

Vaal had taken point. He was lightly armed, due to the fact that he needed to be as nimble as possible to execute his best sword combat. The M6H handgun looked like a toy in his long fingers. There wasn't much room to move around in a typical Covenant ship, but the Blessed Composition was open with plenty of space. Much more open than some of the other cruisers of the same class that Aegis had been onboard to disable.

Vaal's free hand curled upwards, signaling all clear. Both Conan and Trip advanced upwards to the second hangar deck. The quiet interior was ominous and eerie. No guards, no barricades and no alarms. Trip found himself wondering if it could be a trap.

They found a data terminal that allowed contact to any similar terminals on the ship. The curved metal projected a series of pink and purple icons that would've been unrecognizable to humans. Thanks to the translation software, the Spartans could identify what. Vaal had no need for the interpretation, even though having to frequently speak English.

A lone jackal was manning the console, lazily typing and observing the rapidly moving dots. Pyra was the closest and had the honors of doing the kill. With footsteps barely above a whisper, he jostled the alien. The Jackal looked over just in time to see the black armored Spartan shove it down. He placed a boot on the neck and used his heel to twist sideways, making sure he was behind the wall to muffle the loud cracking of bones.

After Pyra finished his work he hefted the carcass over his shoulder

and moved past the team, stuffing it inside a small nook in the side of the ship. Apart from the smears of purple blood that stained the floor, it looked as if the murder never happened.

Daniel Tyler crept up to the set of consoles and immediately got to work. His movements were awkward considering he was clad in an ODST battle suit that had seen better days. Finding a slot in the terminal, he inserted a chip inside. A moment later a flurry of holographic symbols danced across the panel before finally coming to a stop. He pulled a couple of symbols to his right and began reading, his helmet moving slowly in a scanning manner.

"I can't access everything from this terminal. All that is displayed is a rough map of this section of the ship."

"Can you get us the map for the entire vessel?" Aegis asked, scanning the area with Vaal. Corridors were clear, but he was looking for camouflaged elites and any eavesdropping equipment. The Blades had no AI, which was strictly UNSC governed equipment. Yet, software infiltration was often something that the team had limited resources on. Even Daniel Tyler and Luke Riley, excellent hackers could only do so much without the aid of an infiltrator AI.

"Hang on," He grabbed two symbols with his fingers and pulled them down before double tapping the second one. It enlarged and projected into a three square foot layout of the Composer storage room. Purple dots were moving around the balconies surrounding the weapon. A couple of lines were beside the dot to indicate the soldier that it was monitoring.

Aegis and Vaal left them to their work and crossed the hallway that ran above the Composer room. With a little help from Tyler's controlled terminal, the door blinked before soundlessly sliding open. This time Aegis used an Active Camo module taken from a Zealot that he killed during their escape from Kopar Keep. The small obtuse U shaped device used light bending technology to have the wearer blend in with his/her surroundings. Both men crept forward to the edge of the platform. Just like when they first saw it coated in brown Flood appendages, this time absent, the Composer looked as daunting as it was beautiful. The blue lights pulsed causing the enormous purple wires the Covenant had connected to the top to glow in a similar fashion. Below them was another platform that was wider than the one they were upon. The lower floor completely surrounded the cradle save for a long extension area that a group of Ranger elites were attending to. Vaal's light blinked green as he highlighted the cluster of consoles roughly a hundred feet in front of the weapon. He saw his camo meter beginning to deplete and stepped out of view before switching it off.

Vaal materialized next to him, speaking in a hushed voice in case a sentry was nearby.

"Looks like the control area for the weapon. I didn't see any guards in the area, but it doesn't mean that they are there."

Aegis was about to reply when a private channel opened on his suit, "Report."

"Getting sticky sir," Hamed's Arabic accent flowed through the speakers in his helmet. "Covies have multiple guards near the

Slipspace room area."

"Change your plan, if there's not many guards near the fuel storage, arm your charges there and transfer the detonation signal to me."

"Shouldn't I handle the explosives sir?" Wheeler cut in.

"Negative, I need to time it just right." He paused, letting Vaal push him back into the shadows. The elite turned on his more advanced camo and they both silently observed as two blue armored elites with storm rifles passed by. "Once you've set the charges, wink your light and rendezvous with Pyra and Tyler."

Hamed's light blinked green, indicating the four ODSTs had understood his order. Guessing the estimate of the time, the second team would take about five minutes to kill any guards near the fuel conduits. Add another five minutes to set the explosives and they had ten minutes maximum to finish and jump off the boat.

Pyra and Tyler opened the same door that he and Vaal had come through and quickly surveyed the area with their weapons before moving over. Aegis gave Vaal a signal_, prepare to engage hostiles_. The sangheili's hand went behind his back and removed a plasma grenade from his belt. Trip clenched a fist and he pointed his rifle at a grunt on the lower level.

In the corner of his eye, Vaal had armed the grenade and lobbed it at the sangheili manning the Composer station. The blue orb sailed across the room and impacted the unsuspecting soldier's back. The adhesive quickly reacted to the contact of the armor, essentially becoming permanently stuck. The grenade exploded in a flash of brilliant light, painlessly taking the elite with the denotation. Mere seconds after the grenade went off; Aegis leaned over and squeezed the trigger, his shoulder absorbing the predictable recoil of the assault rifle. The silencer muffled the firing sound as the long stream tore two grunts in half by the powerful rounds.

All at once, the Composer room became a flurry of activity. Multiple troops had spotted the foursome and drawn their alien weaponry. Green plasma bolts and bright purple needles crisscrossed the air, fruitlessly finding their targets covering behind several pillars. A thrown plasma grenade landed beside Tyler and Pyra. The ODST armored computer genius found himself being picked up and flung away. In agonizing pain, he lifted his head to see Pyra evade the blast radius in a rather show-off style. Tyler spotted a jackal and peppered several rounds into it. He was fumbling with his new magazine just as soon as the corpse fell back into a pool of its own blood.

The Blades slowly found themselves falling back as the number of grunts began to increase. Elites would take shots and would retreat when the grunts substituted fire. Pyra managed to eliminate one of the elites with sustained fire from his rifle followed by a fragmentation grenade thrown when the grunts stepped in. The lesser aliens began to run away at the sight of their dead leader. The Spartan and Vaal opened fire at the fleeing grunts, easily taking them out.

One of the elites, a gold armored warrior was speaking to what may have been a comm device on his arm. He was growling in sangheili

gibberish and pointing with his free arm at the area where the Blades were attacking.

"What's he saying?" Tyler inquired.

"The cruiser's preparing for a jump into slipspace!" Vaal's tone held urgency normally not present. "We must move quickly! That commander has been ordered to track us down!"

As if the Composer wasn't problematic enough, the slipspace jump would mean that any means off the ship would result in their obliteration. Now it was only a matter of how long before the teams were cornered by the Covenant and killed.

* * *

><p>I really hope you're enjoying the story so far. Please review.

15. Stowaway III

****Onboard **_**Blessed Composition**_** in Slipspace to an unspecified location****

****June 1, 2558****

The big door to the bridge had sealed the second Kasam walked onto the ship's control center. In addition to the standard crew, the room now supported a quintet of sword wielding elites and a dozen grunts armed with needlers. Kasam raised a curious eyebrow at the secondary shipmaster doubtlessly having ordered the extra security. He sighed in frustration; the first officer had been one never to take chances. In sangheili lifestyle, it was all about chances to earn promotion. Caution was something rarely practiced and was frowned upon. It meant losing honor. Kasam already planned to revoke him before the mission was even over.

Putting matters aside, he strode over to his command seat, no way relaxing. "What is our estimated time to arrive?"

"Our destination should be upon us in thirty minutes." The navigation officer didn't even look up when he responded.

"Put as much power necessary to accelerate our arrival." He regarded another officer next, an older sangheili with years of battle under his belt. The armor was worn and more towards the older Covenant style. Kasam was about to ask why the Didact's Hand had permitted such a thing, as the Journey was renounced, but he kept his tongue. "Get me a lock on our intruders and the warriors an unrestricted path towards them."

"Yes Shipmaster." His obedience was more of a growl of scorn than out of straight loyalty. He tapped a couple of symbols on his console. Kasam found himself subconsciously reeling when he saw three digits missing from his right hand. There was something else underneath the scarlet armor and once again, the shipmaster refrained from pressing further. The officer barely caught his glance and shifted his armor so that the scar from a Spartan on his back was now concealed inside his harness.

Kasam finally relaxed in his command seat, watching with anticipation as the four warrior elites and their troops close on the two groups of intruders.

* * *

><p>Hamed's motion tracker flashed blips on his six and in an instant turned around. Wheeler and the other ODSTs had their weapons trained at the entrance to the fuel storage. Wheeler crouched behind a fuel cell, ignoring its hum. Gruff alien chatter came from the other side of the door. No doubt a team of elites was sent. The team kept silent and out of sight as the door was opened and the Covenant fanned out in search of them. They had already begun planting C-12 charges along the walls that separated the corridor from the fuel storage. Although a few cells were present in the hallway, the main force to the explosion was in the other room.<p>

Instantly one of the elites barked and pointed to a pair of C-12 charges near Hamed's location. They had yet to be armed and immediately the warrior was examining the explosive, shoving aside a curious grunt. He found his teammates' heartbeats starting to increase as well as his own. Ideas of eliminating the Covenant were running at a hundred miles an hour in his head. The feeling of remaining undetected was difficult. He remembered one infiltration mission during his time in the 90th ODST Recon Battalion.

He and two others had been sent to detonate a Phantom carrying plasma munitions back to a destroyer that was hammering a nearby evacuation point. The op had gone smoothly and the vivid memories of him staying hidden behind a dormant Wraith were still fresh in his mind. His grip was uneasy on his M7S as a sword wielding elite passed less than a meter in front of him. The glow reflected off his visor as the creature stopped and scanned the area. After what seemed like an eternity, the Covenant moved on and Hamed thought he might have fainted if it weren't for the timely intervention of his two partners.

Wheeler made a fist from his hiding position. Although the others were not able to see, Hamed understood and took out his final charge. Pressing his body against the plasma cell, he peered down the helmet as far as he could and typed in the arming sequence on the detonator. He stuck it to the side after peeling the cover off of the sticky pad on the bomb's back. When he aimed back at the Covenant squad, they had still no interest in the human saboteurs. He counted two elite warriors and a couple of lesser ranked elites. Surrounding them were a pretty decent score of grunts and six jackals. Because the C-12 charges on the wall weren't armed, any detonation would not trigger the explosives inside. Hamed hoped the spot where the detonator was linked wouldn't be destroyed.

The four ODSTs moved like wraiths away from the commotion. When they were nearly at the door, Hamed aimed at the closest grunt; a distant twenty feet and adjusted for the longer range, let out a quick burst. Six rounds spat from the gun's muzzle and the second round embedded itself in the spinal cord. The four successive projectiles impacted the methane harness. The tank made a loud hissing sound as the flammable gas escaped through the breach.

Wheeler saw the elites turn around, seeing their expressions turn

from confusion to determination. Before any of the larger Covenant could remove the plasma rifles on their back, Hamed dove for the door, causing it to open quickly. The team sprinted through the entrance before the elites could cover an eighth of their distance. The door shut and one other ODST put it into temporary lockdown by holding both the manual open and locking icons simultaneously. Temporary lockdown only worked until an override was placed, mainly done by the shipmaster or his first officer. Hamed found his remote detonator and sent the signal to explode.

Linked with the three other charges that Wheeler and the other ODSTs had placed, the hallway exploded into a fiery inferno. Needless to say, the Covenant inside stood no chance. Despite sayings that it could survive shots from a fuel rod gun, the door was blown outward and the intense heat rolled out, shimmering as it dispersed towards the cooler air. The cruiser shook violently from the small but potent blast. Somehow, the wall had protected the fuel cells from detonating as well as leaving the charges that Hamed and the others had planted intact.

Trip's comm channel was buzzing about ten seconds later. Hamed answered grinning behind his polarized silver colored visor. "What the hell just happened? Did you detonate the fuel tanks early?"

"Slight change of plan, had to send a few curious covies on the journey by using the plasma batteries."

He made a quick sign to the other three ODSTs, who chuckled in response. "Fortunately, the charges to the wall of the fuel cells are untouched."

Had the charges to the fuel area exploded, the powerless cruiser would lose all propulsion and rip itself apart once the friction of slipspace had shredded its shields. A similar accident occurred in the 2400s when a UNSC destroyer had its fuel supply hit by stray sparks inside the slipstream bubble. The flammable material ignited and caused the ship to slow down inside. Only a small distress signal was gotten out within the forty seconds between the ignition and disappearance of the warship.

"Vaal and I are nearly to the Composer, we've encountered some friends who don't want to share their toy."

"Then just take it by force." Hamed replied, "I often did that with my two brothers."

"We'll get working on it. In the meantime, seal the fuel area off and make sure the Covenant can't reopen it. It's going to be a tight escape." Aegis cut the connection and ran back to the pillars where Vaal, Pyra and Tyler were firing. He arrived just in time to see a pair of gold warriors exit the other side wielding fuel rod guns. Seeing the intruders made them angry and trigger happy at the same time. Both rushed forward, launchers making a whumping sound as they fired the sparking green bolts. Pyra fired a full stream from his rifle at the closer elite. Its armor was unscathed as the energy shields flared, but did not break. The bolt clacked open, ammunition exhausted. It wasn't a surprising revelation, warrior elites had among the strongest shields of infantry in the Covenant-Promethean alliance, surpassed only by the Knight Battlewagons.

"You do realize that even without a fuel supply, the Composer is still capable of firing." Tyler ejected his spent magazine. "It wouldn't matter even if you destroyed the ship. That weapon is designed to survive the harshest types of destruction."

"Is there a weapon capable of destroying that device? It is impenetrable even to weaponry of the Cove-" Vaal was forced to shout from his position two pillars down and became interrupted as one of the warriors swept the corner. Although he was the first to initially act, bringing the back of the gold and silver gun to hit Vaal squarely in the stomach. He reeled slightly, feigning intense pain as the adversary let out a triumphant growl. With a flick of his wrist, Vaal's energy sword came to life. The warrior swung his weapon again, this time knocking the sword from his grasp. Improvising, the sangheili used his nimble body to practically run up the side of the pillar and land behind the surprised elite. He seized the servant's head with one hand and reached out with his free one to deliver a lethal blow to the back of the head. The sword easily cut through the shields, armor and flesh. Vaal deactivated his blade and retrieved the fuel rod, nodding with satisfaction when he found a half dozen additional rounds in the warrior's bandolier.

Aegis was nearly out of ammo when he saw a purple blur of motion. Out of reflex, he caught the storm rifle that Vaal had tossed over. He targeted the second warrior and poured a rapid stream of hot plasma onto the shields. The warrior returned fire with the fuel rod, one round impacting less than three feet to his left and taking out a healthy portion of his shields. Pyra leaned out to provide suppressing fire as Trip's shields began to recharge. Seeing that the other Spartan had nearly depleted the warrior's energy barrier, he leaned out again and held the trigger on full auto. With the shields down from the first four shots, the flesh began to burn from being hit. It took a while and Trip's lucky step to the right to avoid being hit by another green fuel rod. The plasma was much less effective against armor and flesh as it was against shielding. Just as the warrior died the storm rifle sparked, sending the coil spinning rapidly. He moved the overheating weapon outwards as his HUD displayed a red U shaped meter. The purple weapon cooled down once the red vanished.

With the death of the warriors, the Covenant guards, mainly grunts began circling away in fear. With them on the run, Pyra and Tyler broke cover and began strafing.

"To answer your question, yes it can be destroyed." Tyler finally said, "The Master Chief destroyed the improved one with a HAVOK."

"Yeah we don't have one of those." Aegis retorted sardonically.

"I can try and set the Composer to detonate at a nuclear rate." His movements were more fluid as he waved his rifle to help gesture. "However it will take some time."

"Time is something we don't have." Vaal countered as he slid another magazine into his fuel rod to engage the fleeing grunts.

Suddenly the lights dimmed for a split second before coming back on again. The normal hum of the covie slipspace reactor was now gone,

replaced by a familiar humming of the mainline repulsor engines.

"We must have exited slipspace." Tyler suggested, "Anybody know where we are?"

"Nowhere good."

* * *

><p>Hard to believe this story is nearing completion, only a handful of chapters remain! The sequel is already in the works!
Reviews and comments always appreciated!
**

16. Stowaway IV

Marathon class cruiser UNSC **_Baltic Jewel**_

Battle Group Quebec conducting a naval exercise in the 50 Apus System

June 2, 2558

Commander Pedro Raul Ortiz watched with satisfaction as the _Baltic Jewel_'s MAC shell exploded out of the muzzle. The thunderbolt accelerated, impacting the target; a group of decommissioned vessels, both civilian and military. The thirty ships tethered together had all reached the end of their useful life and were worth more in scrap than they were in functionality. The warships had all suffered terrible wounds against the Covenant and the civilian transports had been damaged in some way, be it accident, Covenant attack or Insurrectionist strike.

The _Baltic Jewel_'s_ target was a UNSC frigate, the _Great Spirit_. _Under fire from her autocannons, the _Great Spirit_ had been bisected when the MAC hit her sharply on the starboard side. In unison, the other UNSC vessels of Battlegroup Quebec had opened up on their targets. Missiles struck, cannons raked and thousands of rounds from every ship's point defense antiaircraft guns turned the immobilized ships into scrap and a massive fireball. Ortiz pulled up a channel on the bridge's holotank. A clear figure of Quebec's commander, Rear Admiral Rudolf Sordijk was displayed. Sordijk was in his early fifties but looked closer to thirty nine. His blond hair was wavy and the perfect length of a pristine officer. Ortiz had been assigned as one of his junior lieutenants on the UNSC _Pearson_ a corvette, which often conducted patrols around untouched Outer Colonies. After being given command of a UNSC destroyer, Sordijk, Ortiz and the original bridge crew met for a drink on Reach. Ortiz himself was promoted to the _Baltic Jewel_ as her executive officer.

"Attention all personnel of Quebec." Sordijk began, "Excellent work on our exercise! I feel that we are as ready as any UNSC fleet currently in operation. Shortly, we will be returning to our port in Earth where you all will have three weeks' leave. Once again, congratulations! We will be conducting our search, rescue and retrieve operations before we make the jump back to Earth."

Ortiz heard the bridge crew cheer loudly, even Captain Becker found herself smiling genuinely.

Ortiz had short black hair styled in a buzz cut with dark eyes that made him hard to read. His figure was slim and he towered over most of the bridge crew. He hailed from Madrigal holding a high opposition to many rebel groups in the area. He immediately joined the Navy and was shipped out well before the Covenant attacked his homeworld. Although emotionally distraught with his parents and brother being killed in the glassing, he had nearly spent as much time in the Navy as he did with his family. Assigned to the Pearson under Sordijk's command, the corvette spent the majority of the war as a scouting vessel for Covenant rally point positions and movements. Soon enough in 2551, Sordijk and most of the bridge crew were transferred to Reach to command a cruiser. The newly promoted Captain appointed Ortiz as a Commander and overall command of the Pearson. Ortiz led many scouting missions of Covenant battlegroups. In patrols of two or three other UNSC corvettes, Ortiz and the other corvette commanders had the job of predicting enemy fleet movements and deploy mines to help weaken them as well as warn nearby fleets. Nuclear mines were often deployed right where Covenant fleets exited slipspace. After the war, Ortiz was assigned as the executive officer of the UNSC Baltic Jewel.

"Commander Ortiz." Becker called from her chair. Ortiz strode over to his officer who was holding a datapad in one of her hands and a cup of water in the other.

"We've got an error with our sensors that just occurred a minute ago."

"Any jammers in the area?" The possibility was always there.

"I've already talked to the Yorkshire and Avalon. They've both reported that their scanners are working perfectly." The Yorksire was Sordijk's flagship, another Marathon cruiser and the Avalon was the destroyer that acted as support for both ships.

"I'll contact the techs and have them ready to go look at the sensors."

"Don't be too long." Becker chuckled, scrolling down on the pad, "We still have to go through the first round on me."

"I don't think Commander Ortiz would miss it for the world." One of the bridge officers remarked from her seat.

Ortiz smirked, rolling his eyes as he exited the bridge. On his comlink he hailed the engine room.

"What's up Commander?" Chief engineer Geordie answered near immediate.

"We have a problem with the sensors. You and I are going to go for a look."

"I will have the EVA suits ready before you even walk in." Geordie killed the connection.

Ortiz walked down the hallways to the areas of the airlock. The sensors were located at the ship's exterior about a hundred meters behind the bridge. Searching them would require the magnetic clamps

on the EVA suits as well as a thruster pack. He quickly stopped in the mess hall to take a bottle of water along the way and continued on. The halls had a few people, mostly army that were stationed aboard and they gave him polite nods and quick greetings, noting that he had to be somewhere from Becker's voice over the intercom.

"So I heard that the exercise went well?" Geordie asked as his suit was sealed by a technician with an audible hiss.

"Admiral Soldijk praised every vessel. All ships performed flawlessly." Ortiz had to raise his voice slightly because he was turned the opposite direction as another technician instructed him to hold his arms out. The EVA armor was simply a repairman's suit designed for activities in the zero gravity environments. There was even a Spartan armor called the EVA that specialized in zero-g combat.

"Good to hear. Especially with the new Covies becoming a larger threat." The chief engineer took a clumsy step and then moved easier as he adjusted to the bulkiness. The technician placed the helmet over Ortiz's head, giving him thumbs up after making sure his suit was in green condition.

"Yeah." He had to agree, even with the presumed death of Jul 'Mdama, the Storm Covenant were growing rapidly, with reports of them swaying populations of former Covenant colony worlds to their cause. It was very possible a second Human-Covenant war could break out. Geordie was waiting beside a pelican assigned for them to take a look at the sensors.

"Hopefully with the Storm siding with the elite rebels on their homeworld, they'll have much less resources to turn on us." Both men stepped onboard the pelican with the pilot already warming up the engines and requesting movement from Baltic Jewel's traffic control. He must have gotten a clearance from the engines whining to a higher pitch and the doors sealing. The pelican eased out of the hangar before cruising alongside the hull of the enormous cruiser. All around them were a total of nine other ships that comprised of Quebec. Because of the narrow gap from gravity pulls on nearby planets, the tight space was excellent for combat training in areas with limited confinement.

The pelican slowed down before reversing and accelerating as the pilot found the correct amount of thrust to keep it stationary. A red light pulsed through the cabin as he sealed the cockpit off and opened the bay's doors. Ortiz felt the dropship's gravity generator go offline when he found himself drifting. HE suppressed the urge to retch, however Geordie was already moving about the cabin, without doubt having done dozens of EVA ops already. The engineer triggered his thruster pack, shooting out of the hatch and moving with speed that resembled being underwater. Ortiz followed suit, finding himself really hot. He quickly adjusted the cooling unit on the suit and relaxed when he found his skin temperatures chill. It wasn't easy being in zero-g, especially when he only did it twice before and neither experience was pleasant. Geordie had already attached his magnetic safety cable to the ship's side. Ortiz reached out with his hands to stop himself and powered his pack so that he would lightly bump the side of the hull. The safety cable was attached to a magnetic anchor about the size of his fist and would prevent the wearer from floating out into space.

A light shone on the sensor area illuminating it in a white glow. The pilot had swung the Pelican around so that he provided enough visibility to know what they were looking at. Ortiz attached the anchor to the side of the hull, making sure the status light was green before moving to join Geordie.

The sensors were a quartet of black semi spheres that were along the side of the hull. There were four more identical ones on the port side, but Becker had reported the starboard side was the ones having issues.

Ortiz opened a holder in his suit and produced a tool that resembled a magnifying glass. Geordie was already working on one of the sensors with the remover. Together they took off the titanium armor that was over the complex part of the cruiser. The covering popped free, allowing both men to take a look inside. Although to Ortiz, the wiring and almost inhuman device seemed completely normal, the engineer thought otherwise.

"I don't know what's wrong with it. Everything checks out."

"Captain," Ortiz called to the bridge, "Can you give me the records for the Jewel's last maintenance check, specifically starboard sensor number three?"

"Sure thing Commander," She got off the line and returned a few seconds later, "Yeah, starboard sensor three was last accessed in April of 2558, reports of malfunctioning nonexistent. Same with all the other sensors of that area."

Ortiz held the covering as Geordie reattached the bolts, waving to the pelican for extraction. Both of them didn't plan on being that long and had maybe twenty minutes left of air. He settled on the floor of the pelican and from the distance deactivated the magnetic anchor, reeling it in before the pilot shut the door and accelerated back towards the hangar. Eager to embrace non recycled air, Ortiz removed his helmet and took a deep whiff.

"You Navy boys haven't gotten used to recycled air." Geordie chuckled.

"I'm used to it all right. I just can't stand it."

After docking back in the hangar, the engineer accompanied him back to the bridge.

"Welcome back to the land of the living." Becker had two cups of water for them. Not being able to drink, both men were too happy to take unmeasured sips. "Did you find any faults in the inspection?"

"Nothing ma'am, the sensors look the same as they did on their last maintenance check."

Becker turned to her communications officer, "Alright, file a technical problem back to Sordijk."

"You got it." The officer began typing when a console manned by the

operations officer nearby began beeping.

"Captain? We've got slipspace activity directly in front of us." He studied the display for a moment, "It's Covenant!"

Almost instantly, a transmission from Sordijk was presented on the ship's holotank.

"Battlegroup Quebec, we have detected a cruiser class Covenant vessel on an intercept heading. Arm your weapons and prepare to engage if it attacks."

Already Becker was at her weapons officer for readying the MAC for firing. From his spot, Ortiz studied the ship, which was at the distance that made it the size of a small model airplane. He had viewed many different types of Covenant vessels during his patrols on the _Pearson_. The lone vessel was a CCS class ship, the backbone of the massive Covenant fleet. Although they couldn't identify the ship or whoever controlled it, the fleet was still wary. Even the elites allied with the Arbiter were ready to fire at UNSC ships at a moment's notice. This cruiser had a noticeably different feature to it, noted by Geordie and a couple officers on the bridge. The dorsal side had a cover over what looked like a projector in a bell shaped lip. Massive cables held the alien device in place that pulsed as if being fed energy from the plasma reactor.

"All stations on alert!" Becker found herself gripping the side of her command seat tight enough to leave deep imprints on the arm. "Get the firing solution on and lock target! It's preparing to fire!"

"Calculating ma'am," the weapons officer informed, "forty-nine percent charged."

"It's about to fire!" Ortiz blurted, watching the projector on the top of the cruiser turn a deep amber orange.

"What the hell is that?" One of the officers asked, "A covie superweapon?"

Ortiz's thoughts darted to the attack on New Phoenix, he knew what it was. As if it was running through his head a transmission laden with menace from the Covenant ship was patched through all the speakers of the ship, not just the _Baltic Jewel_, but every single UNSC ship in the present fleet. "Your filth shall be cleansed by the gods."

Before he had a chance to tell anyone, a wide beam lanced out of the cruiser's top, heading straight for all ten ships of Battlegroup Quebec. Ortiz found himself growing hot and his skin felt prickly. To his horror he watched as Becker attempted to run to the hall. Her skin was suddenly ripped away from her body, exposing the muscle tissue before that too quickly dissolved. Her skeleton suddenly crumpled, enveloped into bright yellow ash that slowly disintegrated her and the other officers. Soon enough, they seemed as if they simply melted off of existence. Ortiz only had the chance to shield his eyes from the blinding light before he joined the fate of the men and women of Battlegroup Quebec.

The _Blessed Composition's_ primary axial weapon powered down and

plowed through the derelict fleet.

* * *

><p>Apologies, this was actually supposed to be Chapter 16, but must have uploaded 17 instead. Better proofread and make sure next time.

17. Finale I

****UNSC **_**Ballista**_**

****Following the **_**Blessed Composition**_** in slipspace****

Drew had taken the conn as the bridge crew monitored the transmissions for Ballista traveling through slipspace. All knew the risks and were willing to commit not just to Aegis and the Blades, but to humanity and its allies as well.

"Helm, what's our ETA?"

Since Trip and Tyler were both onboard the Composition, Vasili Suvorov had taken the station, being the next best helmsman. "We're about ten minutes behind the Composition. She's heading at a course in the 50 Apus system."

"What's her progress?"

"Gaining an eighth of a mile every three minutes." Vasili looked back at the display. He wasn't very good at calculating rates of speed of two ships, but he was the third best at being helmsman.

"Put as much speed down as you can and close that gap! We can't afford to lose the Composition!"

* * *

><p>Blessed Composition_

****Twelve minutes later****

Aegis stared at the horror of what remained of battlegroup Quebec. Within mere seconds, the Composer erased all life from the ten ships. Now merely empty husks, the UNSC ships drifted lifelessly without a destination as the Composition resumed its course.

One of the UNSC destroyers had moved on an intercept as if performing a last act of defiance to the Covenant. Unfortunately, it had no chance. The cruiser's plasma turrets were quickly activated pivoting to the closing derelict and fired three volleys. Over eighteen plasma rounds impacted and melted the armor, now free from its energy shielding protection. Needless to say the destroyer known as Avalon met a quick death, her name briefly visible to Aegis' eye. She listed to the port side, letting the blue plasma explosions claim more until the hull shuddered and fragments flew in multiple different directions.

"Test run." Tyler muttered, ashen from the devastation he had a front seat to witness.

"What?" Pyra was obviously not paying attention due to the fact that he was peering at the other side of the hallway for more patrols.

"They're testing the Composer before they unleash it on their target."

Nobody needed to ask that their target was going to be somewhere humans were staying. All that mattered now was the Ballista and her crew stopping it before it took more human lives. The Composer served as a bridge between the organic and digital realms. It had the capability of making their Forerunner makers immortal. However, the personalities that became "composed" were fragmented and attempts to restore them to organic species ended in failure.

The Didact's Composer that the Covenant now possessed was a prototype of the one that had been used to depopulate New Phoenix. Having stored for hundreds of thousands of years, it showed no signs of age as it cleaned the human personnel in Quebec flawlessly, just like when the Didact had used it against the humans before improving his design. Tyler theorized the Composer's beam as similar to the Promethean sniper rifle. The victim would likely die a painful death while at the same time disintegrating into a glowing yellow ash. There was only one human who ever survived a Composer attack; Master Chief Spartan-117.

Then a voice speaking in an alien garbled language blared over the ships' speakers. The team listened intently as the door opened with Hamed, Wheeler and the ODST team rendezvousing.

"How's the fuel tanks looking?"

"Armed and ready to blow." Hamed and his team took position further down. "Just tell me when to blow it."

"I wouldn't do that." Vaal countered.

"Why?"

"We're about to head into slipspace again. I'd keep your finger off of the charges until we're sure it's okay for us to detonate. We need Ballista to know where we're headed so that they can issue a warning. The announcement said that we are heading for the home of the Prometheans."

The home of the Prometheans was known as Requiem. The Covenant was going to try and depopulate _Infinity_.

Trip knew that relaying a transmission would immediately attract the crew to their location. He silently waved to the others to lay out an ambush while he talked to Drew aboard.

The ODSTs plus Tyler covered one side while Pyra and Vaal watched the other. Trip knelt in the center of the hallway and keyed his channel.

"Ballista, this is Aegis. Get into slipspace as soon as you can, the Covenant are jumping to Requiem!"

"We'll have her there faster than you know." Drew replied. There was shouting from Suvorov before the transmission was even over.

The peaceful silence was interrupted by the hum of the ships' slipspace drive was reactivated. The slow deadbeat sound slowly grew in volume before leveling off at its peak.

"Give me some good news." Aegis turned to Tyler.

"In fact I do." He looked around as if looking for eavesdroppers. "From the few seconds I had to glance at the conduits, I think I may have a solution."

"Spit it out." Pyra let out an annoyed huff.

"Those conduits are what channel energy into the Composer in a stable manner so that it can be fired in a beam wherever the ship directs it at. The energy would run wild if it didn't have a stable place to funnel it at."

"So we'll have to go back to the Composer?"

"Yes. What we'll have to do is to sever all the conduits that take the Composer's power to the ship's projector."

"Tell me more," Aegis made a circling motion with his finger. The teams rose as one and stealthily moved back to the upper decks. Still, the room had fallen Covenant troops that stained the floor with mixes of blood. It seemed as if an infant was given a multitude of colors and a canvas to paint on.

Aegis and Pyra moved to the first conduit and used their feet as a stable place to uproot the conduit. Despite their strength, the conduit refused to budge from the socket.

"I figured that they would be difficult to remove." Vaal hushed the two aside, lighting his sword. He swung a vicious slash, cutting effortlessly through the metal filaments inside. The entire room shuddered, as if in pain from an artery being sliced from the heart.

In a blur of motion, Pyra saw something blue whiz right past his face. Before fully realizing what it was, he shoved Aegis and Vaal down to the floor. The blood slicked his armor, causing him to slide a bit.

Heat washed over them as the plasma grenade exploded. Already he heard the muffled burps of the ODST's weapons returning fire. Vaal whipped out his fuel rod and launched a few rounds to keep the enemy at bay. One of the rounds hit a grunt dead center wielding another fuel rod gun. Wheeler grabbed the launcher and kicked it over near Vaal, the blood helping it slide right to the sangheili's waiting foot.

Aegis peered out, firing the storm rifle. His first victim, an elite had its shields quickly breached and toppled over before any major damage could be done. He pivoted, just in time to see a grunt with a plasma pistol already green. The grunt released the trigger, sending a large circular ray that impacted Aegis squarely in the chest, pushing him backwards and draining his shields to the point that his

armor was sparking and alarms in the suit were wailing about the main form of defense was now overloaded. The grunt made ready to ignite another plasma grenade. It was a familiar trick that many smarter grunts used. The overcharge would drain the Spartan's shields, making any other weapon much more dangerous since the shields took the brunt of the attacks.

Aegis unleashed a hail of plasma before the grunt even had a chance to even cock his arm back to throw. The grenade stuck to the floor and detonated harmlessly.

Hamed had finished filling the last elite with rounds from his rifle when the grunts realized that they were leaderless. All that survived the initial assault threw their arms up, chattering excitedly in their language and ran off into the hallway where they had come from. Surprisingly, none had rushed forward with lighted grenades in a suicide, last ditch attempt to take out the attacker.

"If only every Covenant were like that." Pyra muttered. "We would've won the war much easier."

"Sometimes it's not advisable to run." The Blades all turned to find the source of the voice. The maroon armored Zealot stood at the top deck giving him a vantage point as he surveyed the adversaries in front of him. Kasam reached into his belt and pulled out a hilt. The sizzle of his energy sword cracked to life.

"Do not meddle with the followers of the Didact's Hand." Kasam jumped down, landing with a thud that splashed some blood on his leg armor that resembled war paint.

"You will be the next of many victims to the Composer."

* * *

><p>The tension is building as the Blades duke it out with the Composition's commanding officer! Will they be able to stop the ship before it kills everyone aboard _Infinity_?

>

Please drop a review. I don't think I have even had one for this story since I returned from hiatus.

18. Finale II

**Blessed Composition**

June 1, 2558

"Haven't you learned to invade the human fleet before you lay waste to them?" Vaal asked coolly to their new visitor.

"I figured somebody was onto us when I saw a phantom that was doubtlessly yours when we had retrieved the Composer."

"Just so you could extinguish more human lives." Aegis spat, "Didn't you learn anything from the Arbiter?"

Kasam lighted a plasma grenade, tossing it at the group. He let out a sadistic chuckle as they dived for cover, certain that they had only bought a few precious seconds of their wretched lives.

"The Arbiter is a traitor to Sangheilius! Never have I heard a Covenant species, let alone one of ours display such softness to beings that defile the holy sites of our gods! I was much uninterested in the remains of our fleets allying with humanity. I instead turned my attention to my Jiralhanae attackers."

Kasam pointed his sword at the Composer. "Go ahead, take a long look. It was built by the Didact centuries before the one he had used to devastate the Earth city. The fact that even he despised your species as a whole only proves to everyone else that humans are the scourge of the galaxy and must be eradicated for more fitted species to prosper." With a flick of his hand, a dozen elites faded out of camo beside the small shipmaster.

"Now fall in line." Kasam led the way as each of his elites grabbed a member of the Blades. They marched past packs grunts and jackals that joined the group. The zealot finally halted in front of the score with all the escape pods. "Get them in."

Tyler was one of the first shoved inside, but he attempted to resist. With the distraction from Hamed, he jabbed a fist straight into his captor's eye. The elite roared in pain as he clutched his bleeding eye. Tyler immediately dove for the energy sword on his hip, his hands brushing against the silvery hilt. Then he felt a much stronger hand wrapped around his.

"Such a frail effort." With a mighty heave, he had thrown Tyler against the back of the escape pod. The force had broken something inside the armor and he lay on the floor unmoving. With their comrade, Hamed, Wheeler and the other ODSTs were herded in. Despite the grim situation, none of the Blades showed any sign of weakness. They simply looked at Aegis from their visors as if he was the next to be sacrificed on the altar.

Two of the elites held Vaal, who at this point had stopped attempting to struggle out of their grip. Outside of the pod, Vaal, Surorov, Pyra and Aegis remained, resisting their elites' urges to enter.

"Hey." Pyra regarded his captor, who looked at him with an unamused face. "There's something itching on my leg, can you get it off for me?"

He uttered an incomprehensible growl and bent down to inspect Pyra's right leg. That was the first huge mistake he did, not only did it obstruct his view of the other three members, which were farther away from the pod than him, but it also exposed all his vitals to the armored Spartan.

Faster than anyone could ever react without MJOLNIR armor, Pyra seized his persecutor's face and smashed it against his foot going head to head in the opposite direction. As the Kasam and his grunt/jackal lance looked in confusion, Aegis and Suvorov had both broken free and killed the elites holding them. Aegis retrieved the Carbine, firing three shots at the nearest grunts, putting them down. Suvorov tossed a plasma grenade at the overhead water pipes, which

detonated, coating the entire pod bay in a fine mist.

Kasam swung his sword at Aegis, a blur of white motion. The latter barely had time to lean back as the tips passed inches above his helmet. Had he ducked a second later, his head would be strewn on the floor in a bloody splatter. He swung the carbine at the zealot, hitting him on the side of the shoulder, not where he had intended. Kasam let out an irritated snarl, putting a foot in Aegis' chest, sending him sprawling down.

As he got up, the zealot had triggered the jettison on the escape pod with the ODSTs inside. The pod moved to a launching area where it would be shot out once the cruiser's safety feature was shut down when it exited slipspace.

He shot the carbine in the air in front of the panel, but no shields flared. The bastard had turned on his camo and ran off. "Damn it!"

"What happened?" Pyra sprinted up to him, followed by Vasili and Vaal. Both Spartans held storm rifles and Vaal held a needler.

"The elite shipmaster escaped!"

"Commander!" Tyler cried, he must have been in intense pain from when Kasam had thrown him across to the pod.

"Tyler, are you and the Helljumpers okay?"

"Yeah, we're still sitting in the launch bay. Listen, I know how to stop the Composer and render it useless with the charges that Hamed had planted in the tanks."

"Yeah go on."

"Okay, the remote hacking for the weapon is not working and I don't think humans are capable of interacting with the controls in place. Despite it being able to be touched by humans, the Storm's linked up a barrier that only permits sangheili to be able to issue commands directly in the same room."

"Vaal, get to the Composer room and follow Tyler's orders when you're in a position to reset. Pyra, Suvorov and I are going to the hangars to find a suitable escape craft."

"That scum will not escape my grasp." Vaal snarled, looking around for another weapon to carry. Aegis spotted a deactivated sword and tossed the hilt to his sangheili friend who caught it easily in his free hand.

"Don't get yourself killed now." Pyra knocked his arm, "Where will I find another Covie takedown specialist."

"You will find one." Vaal gave a solemn nod to Aegis and Suvorov before sprinting down the hallway.

"C'mon Trip." Vasili started down the opposite, "We don't have much time."

The Spartans felt the ship shudder and the vibrations of the

slipspace drive slowly die away. _Blessed Composition_ had stopped her jump, heading to Requiem.

"Yeah, we don't."

* * *

><p>Vaal crept up to the series of panels in front of the Composer. The wires indicating that this was the correct place to be.<p>

"I am at the Composer's control station. What do I do next?"

Tyler had already begun to reply with instructions, but Vaal was not actually paying attention. Barely moving his head, he swept a gaze at his surroundings, taking in anything that was watching. Sure enough, he caught a distortion at the end of the room. It began a steady stride towards him. Vaal "ignored" him, reaching out with his hands and making sure his actions did not tamper with anything.

Kasam faded out of his camo and swung a high strike. Talam moved to parry, but the swing was actually a fake and he withdrew his sword at the last minute for a lower strike at Vaal's legs. The small zealot was short of eight feet tall, but he was quite agile, intelligent, strong and still way taller than a fully armored Spartan. Vaal struck at Kasam's abdomen, the blade missing, however he managed to strike a blow on his opponent's stomach, sending him sprawling on the floor.

Although in a disadvantageous position, Kasam mockingly laughed, "This is what happens when we side with the vermin known as humans." His sword glowed again as Vaal parried the strike, causing both of their vision to become white from the flash. He rolled into a defensive position as Kasam stood with his back to the hallways outward. The doors opened and a lone grunt stepped out. Before he even had a chance to say anything, Kasam lighted a grenade in one hand, tossing the hapless cannon fodder towards Vaal with the grenade stuck to his face.

He ducked, rolling smartly out of the way as he readied himself for another charge. The grunt impacted the wiring field by the Composer encased in a white light as it slowly fell to pieces in the same manner as the functioning weapon. He had coolly blocked and struck, having to constantly change his strategy as Kasam seemed to be a highly unpredictable foe. Vaal could tell he was very skilled with the blade; most zealots had to be, when in the Covenant or the Storm. However he also radiated a more snob and arrogant side, the one he was using to attack now. It was a common trick, especially for sangheili when they fought Spartans. It depicted a style that made their enemies feel inferior, giving the sangheili a combat advantage. Vaal found himself thrown down, merely feet from the Composer's energy fields.

"You lack proper swordsmanship." Kasam twisted his blade so that it pointed straight at Vaal. "You deserve no right to handle a blade."

He shifted his legs so that he could propel himself up, using his sword to strike down. Kasam had been gloating and had just enough time to parry the strike and prevent his head from coming off. Vaal this time, attacked in a rage. The zealot had himself stuck.

"I'm one of the Blades." Vaal snarled, sweat and blood dripping from his body.

Kasam lunged, just what he was expecting. Swiftly, he moved as if dodging then brought the sword down away from his adversary's sword hand. He swept out Kasam's leg, avoiding a stab from his free hand's dagger. Grabbing the hand with the dagger, he half threw/shoved the smaller elite towards the energy field. Kasam looked back with Vaal holding a sword and a lighted plasma grenade at his own feet. Vaal lunged through the blue detonation. Kasam made to dodge, but then realized what he had just done. Vaal had purposely worked their sword duel towards the Composer's energy field. With only a small section to funnel and Vaal at the only exit, he had dived the other way.

Abhe Kasam's left leg briefly touched the Composer's unstable energy field. He reached out to an expressionless Vaal, who did nothing to help him. Horrified, he tried to pull himself out of the harm's way and in the midst of the frenzy, saw his leg, the one that had first entered the field, glow white and shatter into burning ash.

Vaal Talam, bruised, bleeding, but victorious watched as Kasam's entire body began to glow white and then yellow, dissolving into tiny light particles like the many humans he had composed in battlegroup Quebec. The disintegrated remains seeped through the cracks like water, taking their presence along with it to the emptiness of the cruiser.

"By the way." Vaal continued, even though nobody was in the room. "I'm not a swordsman. I just swing the blade at my enemy until they have no more limbs to hit back with."

* * *

><p>UNSC _**Infinity**_

Requiem

"Commander, we are getting word of a Covenant cruiser inbound!"

Sarah Palmer had just come back from the Spartan Ops center and joined the lieutenant at his station. After reading the reports on the scan, she looked out the window of Infinity's bridge. A Covenant CCS designated cruiser had just completed its slipspace jump.

"Reinforcements?" She asked to no one in certain.

"Negative. Her readings indicate there's not much room for troops other than the crew that is assigned to protect it."

"Either way, they're not going to be much of a protection crew for long. Weapons give me a bead on its course for the MAC and get some of our Howler missiles to weaken the shields!"

"Sarah hold it!" Tom Lasky sprinted to the bridge with a bottle half filled with water. Moist spots were on the sides of his mouth from a rushed swig.

"Lieutenant, scan the vessel before you attack."

"Are you crazy?" Palmer exploded, "We could die before you finish concluding that it's a Covenant vessel, which it clearly is!"

"You're not going to believe this, but the ship is carrying a higher amount of Forerunner signatures!" The lieutenant replied, his face ashen as the scan continued to feed out more results. "The signature is the same one that the Composer emitted last year!"

"No way." Someone else whispered, "Another Composer?"

"Weapons, get those MACs online as fast as you can!" Palmer shouted down the bridge. The weapons station personnel looked at each other before furiously typing buttons into a steady stream of beeps and sounds.

"I'm getting a power surge in the ship! She's charging up!" Although unfamiliar to the other officers, it was not new fantasy to Lasky. Instantly the chatter that Crimson had intercepted was now frighteningly real.

* * *

><p>I have finally arrived to the climax and a cliffhanger! I honestly didn't think I'd make it this far! Will the Blades be able to stop the Composition in time?
>

19. Finale III

That's right, Kasam's dead! Anybody else happy to see the bastard go?

* * *

><p>Blessed Composition_

June 1, 2558

"Well this is absolutely perfect." Vasili Suvorov grumbled as he took another shot at the three jackal snipers pinning them down at the hangar entrance. "We go from bad to nearly being annihilated in a bunch of escape pods."

Aegis drained the battery on his storm rifle at a group of grunts nearby, he switched to his plasma pistol, the last weapon he had available beside his knife. "You know what he was going to do once we were in those buckets off of his ship? He was going to fire the Composer at us, you know, kind of a sticking a finger in the face concept."

The only intact transport on the entire ship was a phantom parked at the other side. Aegis and Suvorov had went forward when they came under fire from a party of an elite, grunts and three jackal snipers attempting to grab the same ride off the ship as well. They must have gotten smart and knew that the ship was doomed and to hightail it off

ASAP.

The two sides exchanged fire and the Covenant would have been easily put down, that is if the team had been properly armed. Instead, Trip had started with a near empty storm rifle and a plasma pistol, Suvorov had a storm rifle as well and Pyra had found one of the newer beam rifles at the back and provided much needed sniper support.

The elite knew that he had to delay his boarding on the phantom, because if he left, the grunts would not put up a fight and flee. The jackals would likely be more helpful, but they were more focused on the sniper in the back.

Trip held down the trigger, while Suvorov ducked back from the green flying everywhere. His shields had brightened and flickered to recharge. Aegis' plasma pistol overloaded and he released the trigger, the bolt doing the work tracking the shielded target. The elite had flinched from the impact, but dove to the side to the gravity beam of the phantom. Pyra had attempted a sniper shot, but he did not have enough time to fully compensate the aim and a jackal sniper was permanently zoomed on his cover. The big Spartan held out his beam rifle to try and get a decoy. It must have worked because the jackal sniped three times, all missing the weapon. When he heard the familiar hissing sound of the sniper overheating he swung out, quickly centering his crosshairs. At this point, he didn't care where the shot landed, the jackals that had him sitting behind the pillar were quite aggravating, sniping frantically whenever he twitched out of the side in their view. With a squeeze of the trigger, the beam rifle took out the sniper over three hundred meters away. Before the second sniper could react, he shot him in the chest.

The last jackal was about to get aboard after the remaining grunts when the gravity lift shut off and the dropship sped off into the vacuum. He stared in surprise after a while, not noticing Aegis behind him. He shot the alien with his plasma pistol and took the beam rifle, nudging it to make sure it was dead.

"Commander, you there?" Hamed's voice came onto his comms.

"I'm here Hamed."

"The cruiser is charging up the Composer!"

"Did Tyler give Vaal instructions on how to disable it?"

"I did." His voice was weak with a cough interrupting his speech. "If all is right, Vaal would have taken care of it." Suddenly the ship rumbled as Hamed and Tyler detonated the fuel tanks with their preplanted charges. A massive unholy groan came within the depths of the ship as if it felt pain of tearing itself apart. "I also suggest that all of you find a way off the Composition as soon as possible."

"Perfect." Suvorov motioned in the direction the phantom had left in. "No ride out of here."

"Actually there is." Conan Pyra came jogging up to them from behind with a trio of plasma thruster packs. "We jump."

* * *

><p>Vaal, knowing what Tyler instructed him to do was now rushing back through the small area of the barracks desperate in search for something to escape off of the ship. All phantoms in the hangar bays were gone, all escape pods launched and their boarding craft was in too bad of a shape to make flight. That left only one option. He sprinted past grunts that were all running around in the middle of the intense shaking with their hands up and elites barking out orders to the cowardly troops. Nobody gave him a second glance.<p>

He stopped at the shipmaster Kasam's quarters and peered inside. The desk that was previously neatly organized with reports and pads was all knocked askew. A display plasma repeater had now lay on the floor. He scooped it up, placing it on his back for later use. Sounds of a patrol neared and he ignored them, but one curious elite stopped and looked in to see someone looting the shipmaster's office.

"You! Stay out of the shipmaster's quarters!" He snarled, pointing down as if to face punishment. As if complying, Vaal walked over, keeping his balance as another tremor struck the ship, instead of facing his guilt and Vaal punched the elite, sword in hand and ignited the blade. He died from being stabbed before he had pulled the twin plasma prongs out. Thankfully nobody had seen what had happened, leaving the sangheili Blades member to do his work unnoticed.

The armor locker held a single Ranger suit that Kasam had likely used during his inspection of the Composer's exterior. Working feverishly, he slipped on the armor which had fit him perfectly. Kasam had no doubt had trouble using it as the suit was fit for the average sangheili size, which Vaal was slightly bigger than. He then noticed a small jar at the end of the desk, upon closer inspection, his mouth dropped open in surprise and he placed it on his belt, double checking it along with his gear that it was secure. At first the suit was bulky, but he got the hang of it within two steps of sprinting down to the nearest airlock.

Unfortunately the shields were still up and a trip to the shield generator may be too long before he would die with the vessel. Even if it was risky, the generator overload would be his best bet of getting off; the bad part is that any open hangars would be far off. He was already on his way there before his way of escape had come to mind. The shields were powered by the pinch-fusion reactor that was deeper inside the ship. They fed plasma energy to the generators which would activate when sensing an attack incoming to block the hull from enemy fire. The Covenant had improved their shields to resist ballistic rounds that their UNSC opponents utilized so that the energy barrier would be even more durable.

The shield generators were three large cylindrical purple objects with panels all around to control them. He skidded to a stop at one, shot the grunt that was at the panels nervously looking around and began to overload the sequence. He made sure to do it for the one that was performing the least expected so that he shields would recharge right after his escape.

"Warning, shield overload in progress, stand by for commencing emergency protocols."

Vaal spotted an emergency airlock that led out to space. With a quick

scan of his armor and deeming he was safe to leave, the heavy door opened and sealed behind him before he grunted at the handle to the exterior. It budged slightly but the lock on the other side refused to open. Growling in frustration and running rapidly out of time, he drew his sword and carved a large hole in the bulk. He let himself be sucked out of the opening out onto the exterior of the cruiser. Looking up, he saw Requiem for the first time and gaped in awe.

Built tens of thousands of years ago, it spellbound anyone looking at its sheer magnitude. He spotted a large opening at the top and an enormous ship orbiting overhead. That must be the Infinity. She was on an intercept course with her weapons primed, but he knew that that wasn't necessary.

With the shields coming on at the bridge section, Vaal triggered his thruster pack and jumped into the void. He felt nausea bubbling in his stomach forcing him to keep whatever he had down. Zero-gravity backgrounds were not always his thing, despite having been out in the environment dozens of times on various missions.

"Vaal!" Trip's voice blared through his armor speakers after he finally managed to get time to adjust his frequency. "Get off of the ship! If Tyler's right about whatever you did, you're about to kill yourself!"

"I'm alright my friend." He calmly assured him, "And yes, I know exactly what I was doing. I knew the risks and it would be worth it to save Infinity and humanity as a whole if it costs me my life."

"Glad you're having you honor talks and all," Tyler interrupted, "but the show's about to start."

The Blades team, all stranded in various places around the burning cruiser watched as the Composer heated to firing sequence. A lance of the orange light arced out, but then as if twisted by an invisible force curved with the shields that Vaal had put into overdrive. The beam finally covered the ship from bow to stern causing it to rumble. Inside, the entire remaining Covenant screamed in their final moments as they turned white and disintegrated into glowing amber ash. The crew was annihilated unseen to those on the outside. For a few seconds the Blessed Composition lay still, and then a large purple wave seemed to leap out of the stern. Her engines had gone critical. The lifeless vessel had smaller bluish explosions scattered in the hull before finally breaking apart. None of the fragments showed any signs of the Composer being intact.

* * *

><p>Onboard the Infinity, the crew let out a loud cheer as the Covenant ship seemed to destroy itself. Even Lasky couldn't suppress a smile and his congratulations to the crew.

"It seems like the Commander has a thing for blowing up Covenant space boats by staring at them." One of the lieutenants joked, followed by laughter on the bridge.

"Captain! I'm getting a call for help! Its origin appears to be coming from near the cruiser's debris field." The comms lieutenant

waved him over.

"This is Captain Lasky of the UNSC _Infinity_."

"Captain Lasky." A stern and alluring male voice wafted in from the other end, "This is Spartan Aegis. We've been tracking that Covenant cruiser and had finally got the chance to take it out once it's final plan was put into motion to compose _Infinity_ and her entire crew."

"Our sensors picked up a signature similar to the Composer, so in a sense you eliminated the threat?" The Captain found his palms becoming sweaty.

"Just like we were paid to do, somebody must have known the Covies were up to something." Aegis replied, now clinging to the pod that Tyler and the ODSs were on.

"I had intercepted that message about a superweapon. I guess that I and the crew of _Infinity_ need to give huge thanks. Where's your aircraft?"

"We're actually all on an escape pod drifting in the debris field, no craft were available after we had left."

"I see." Lasky waved his hand for the ship's traffic control to get pelicans out. "I'm sending a pelican down for retrieval."

"Thank you so much. Our ship should also be in shortly."

The Captain cut the connection after that. "Lieutenant James, you've got the conn."

He wanted to personally greet the people that had saved his ship.

"Oh and Commander Palmer?" Lasky gave a slight smirk, "I can't wait until you can blow up Covenant ships by glaring at them. Spartan Laser surgery maybe?"

* * *

><p>The story is finally over! Please tell me how I did not just for the last part but for the story overall. Stay tuned for the epilogue; some very important events will occur. And maybe if you're lucky, you will get a teaser of the second installment!

20. Epilogue

**Ballista ****in orbit over Reach**

June 7, 2558

"I tell you, it was definitely not part of my training." Vaal held up his glass filled with a dark amber liquid, "Even when you're a lethal spec ops warrior."

The Blades all laughed with Trip not being able to suppress his

smile. Even the Blades' steward found himself grinning at the statement.

"Vaal Talam," Suvorov widened his hands for exaggerating, "Nasty and lethal killer that will destroy all who oppose him, afraid of zero gravity."

This earned an even larger round of laughter. Vaal playfully hit the Spartan, but smiled as well.

Trip excused himself from the group and went back to the ops center. Since the ship was now docked in orbit over Reach for some repairs, the crew had only days before they embarked on their next mission, received and accepted by Drew as they exited slipspace. Trip threatened jokingly about revoking Drew's share of the pay much to his dismay.

The Composition had been completely destroyed in the combination of the self-composing and fuel explosions, which had spread to the engines and led to her demise. Infinity seemed a little confused at why a Covenant ship would self-destruct, but powered down its weapons and sent the team a pelican for retrieval. Nevertheless, the boarding team was greeted by a huge jubilant crowd of Infinity's crew. Although quick and not thoroughly planned out, there was a party in the S-decks for the Blades, like for Crimson mere weeks ago. Aegis himself gave a toast with Captain Lasky to Infinity's long career as well as those serving aboard her.

The teams all helped themselves to good food, drinks and a lot of time telling stories of what had happened. Laughs were shared, pictures taken, many happy memories.

Although not all endings were happy, this one had to be among the best at the mission's conclusion. He was only too happy to get back to his station and take off the armor. A few joints had popped in him as he stretched. The armor felt just as if he hadn't even put it on. He was so used to it, that he could familiarize his limits both in and out of it. The techs shook their heads when they saw his suit covered in blood and a couple of plasma burns. They could be washed away and repaired, he could not.

He headed to his room and picked up his datapad. On the screen was himself posing in a Spartan undersuit with two thumbs up and grinning from ear to ear. Beside him, with his arm wrapped around her, was a girl about his age at the time. In the image, she wore a baby blue colored dress, accenting her curves and gave an intense sheen to her golden blonde hair and her sea blue eyes.

The image was from his graduation to becoming a Spartan-IV. He along with forty nine other men and women were transformed from battle-hardened soldiers to fully armored and operational supersoldiers. Trip fondly remembered the serene beaches on Earth where he and three of his marine buddies celebrated his massive accomplishment. All of this was years before the Blades were even a thought in his head.

As much as he wanted to remember all of them, it was beyond him to let his past linger in his mind. He had no idea where all of his friends from high school and the three from that picture were. He definitely knew the woman's location.

Thumbing out of the image, Aegis typed up a report for Adamant, making sure that Drew had maneuvered the ship so that her cameras caught a steady viewing of Requiem and the _Composition_'s destruction. He personally signed it and gave instructions on the method of pay. The money would go to his surface bank account so that it could not be traced. The surface account would be withdrawn by him and sent to all of his members as well as all the expenses the Blades had every day.

His room was the largest cabin of any of the members, with an open space, a king sized bed with pads and sheets that resembled clouds when slept upon, a copper bathtub and shower and a very nice bathroom area. On his dresser for his clothing and Spartan undersuits was a model of the _Ballista_.

Only Drew was more in love with the ship than him.

Prior to their return at Reach, Trip and Vaal made a temporary stop back at Kopar Keep on Sanghelios. After requesting Iere Rolam's presence, she was completely shocked and torn to see them back with a jar of what remained of her husband. Vaal explained that Hoda Rolam was not cooperative at helping Kasam and his Storm followers on finding the Composer. Once the Storm began to rise to power, Hoda had been kidnapped from his fleet without as much as a goodbye signal to anyone and brought to Requiem for study and location of the Composer. He was killed by Kasam after he had nearly depicted the location and his body burned to ashes. Once he pinpointed the location on the Forerunner planet, Kasam just orbited from above until he had found exactly what he was looking for. His wife however accepted the remains of her husband so that he could be properly buried with his ancestors. Aegis and Vaal stayed for another hour watching as she directed some of her servants in carving Hoda's history in the Kopar keep's murals. She later expressed her thanks and told both men that she was in debt to both.

"It's not a problem." Aegis smiled, "We take care of our friends."

His comms beeped, bringing him out of his inner thoughts and he looked at the caller, it was Dan Tyler.

"Commander, you may want to come look at this."

He didn't have to reply. Throwing on a T-shirt and some gray athletic pants, he made his way to the ops center. Most of the crew was already on leave at Reach. Leah told him that she was anxious to get planetside to make up all the shopping time she had lost. A few female Blades agreed to go with her. All the male members of the Blades practically groaned at her statement, Aegis included.

Tyler handed him a datapad with a blanched expression.

"Looks like you need some food."

"That's not the problem." The helmsman reached over on his datapad and pressed the play button. Trip watched, with his eyes widening at the familiar face ranting something that sounded very real and vengeful. He regained his composure as the angered voice rose in pitch before ending without any trace of its origin or the

messenger's whereabouts.

"He should be dead. How is he not dead?"

"I don't know boss man. What is the UNSC going to do?"

"I don't know." Trip sank down in the command chair. "It varies if they're mobilizing a force to defeat the Storm. Can you find out where it broadcasted to and from?"

"Hold on." Tyler pulled up his computer and typed furiously away at the keys. Trip wasn't even sure that he himself could type that fast. "Okay the broadcast was on every network of UNSC media and it originated from an untraceable place."

"So now the Storm has a cyber-network we can't tap into."

"That's about it. They'll need another advanced infiltration AI if they want any chance of cracking their chatter. Even then, it's pretty slim odds."

"I'm sure the UNSC has already prepared a response." Aegis stood up, "For now, we've got a new mission. Get yourself some rest, you've earned it."

"Thanks boss man." Tyler used his nickname for Aegis as he rubbed the dressing applied to the back of his head.

Trip quietly left his ship and took the planet's only functioning space elevator down to New Alexandria. Although the city was the largest on Reach at the moment, he tended to find more solace in its quieter suburb districts.

He found himself drawn to an electronics store with large screens and holotanks available for purchase. On the featured enormous holographic projector was a young woman seated behind a desk with a datapad.

"Covenant forces at Requiem staged an attack on Infinity last week, spearheaded by a Forerunner superweapon they have acquired from an unknown point. Nobody was injured in the attack and the superweapon was destroyed by a mysterious group of Spartans coming to the ship's aid. The crew of the Infinity has refused to identify who their saviors are, but it was abundant that they had arrived at a perfect time. Captain Tom Lasky has filed reports to FLEETCOM to request additional security for his ship and her operations."

"A mysterious team of Spartans?" One of the men watching asked to the crowd, "Are they ONI?"

Trip silently eased to the outside of the crowd and began his way to a nearby eatery, eager to fill his stomach. Drew had spoken of a very tasty corner sushi bar that he decided to try out. Those people would never know how close they became to be all eradicated.

"Following the attack, the UNSC had received a threatening message from someone thought to be dead. There are no clear details about how Jul 'Mdama has survived, although he has clearly sworn revenge not only on the UNSC, but also to the intruders who had destroyed the Covenant superweapon."

* * *

><p>Sadly the story has come to an end with the Epilogue! However there is some good news! The next installment featuring the Blades is already written! Leave a review if you want a teaser!
*</p>

I currently have some Blades members that have yet to make their debut. This will also be mentioned in Resolve's Light as well. Now is your chance to join the Blades family! Please message the author (that's me) if you are interested if you want to fill in a slot.

21. Resolve's Light teaser

The three Spartans stepped out and sprayed fire into the hold, making sure that no unarmed pirates were hit. Instantly, combined with the fact of toxic air and automatic fire, the crowd suddenly became a mass exodus.

Aegis and Pyra waved their hands, causing two of the sangheili also hidden and observing to shut off the lights. Without the largest visual aid, the pirates would be even more dazed and probably scared out of their minds.

The three Spartans switched on their VISRs, a special night vision that could depict armed pirates in red and noncombatants in yellow. Their target was highlighted in purple with a plasma pistol in hand.

Like wraiths, the Spartans and hidden elites armed with carbines opened fire upon the crowd, making sure they only fired at armed pirates. A few returned fire, but no rounds had even hit the shielded operatives. They had already vanished before their targets even knew that they were shooting back.

Aegis silently slipped away from the others, working along the back wall of the fight. Of course, Prith was firing at the origin of a carbine shot. One of his shots must have gotten lucky because the bolt impacted right where one of the cloaked elites was. The invisible warrior was far enough away to keep Trip from identifying who exactly he was. A few more pirates fired their needle rifles at where he had been seen. Unorganized, they had missed their window yet again as the elite's camo regenerated and he faded from view, moving out of sight so that their shots hit the back wall.

* * *

><p>The second installment, Resolve's Light will be out soon! Already I have 6 chapters written out of my estimated 18.</p>

End
file.